

THE FINE TUNED VIOLIN
HELPS ON PREVENTING AND RESOLVING TEAM CONFLICT ON THE MISSION FIELD

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Introduction

Conflict could be compared to the tension on violin strings. If the strings are too tight, they will snap and the only thing that is left is a broken violin. If the strings do not have any tension, one cannot enjoy the beautiful music played by the master musician.¹ In many ways conflict within teams is similar, where it is necessary to have tension in order to be continually challenged and grow beyond the individual's experience. However, conflict can also act like a cancer that spreads throughout the team and kills everything in its path.

Member care staff at the International Mission Board have interviewed missionaries who have left the field early and have determined that one of the biggest reasons they leave is because of conflict with other missionaries. The conflict might involve the missionary's supervisor or a fellow team member, but the added stress of team tension is too much for many who eventually decide to resign. As missionaries in Spain, it is necessary to have team conflict resolution in order to provide a constant witness in a spiritually dark land. There are a variety of ways in which to facilitate conflict resolution for teams through examining: team dynamics that contribute to conflict; causes of team conflict; preventive measures for team conflict; and solutions for resolving team conflict.

Team Dynamics That Contribute to Conflict

There are different stages of team development that contribute to team conflict. Each team usually goes through the "forming, norming, storming, and performing" stages.² When a team is first assembled and is in the forming stage, everyone is trying to figure out how things

¹Clint Maun, "Conflict Management: What Really Works?," ClintMaun CSP: Information Resources for Healthcare, web page; available from http://www.clintmaun.com/articles/conflict_management.shtml; Internet; accessed 19 December 2006.

²Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Team* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2005), 46-49.

work, the different personalities of team members, and his or her specific role on the team. Then the team moves to the norming stage, when the team members establish values, accept a certain style of leadership, and interaction takes place according to a certain set of written and unwritten rules.

The next period is the storming stage where team conflict emerges. The members might challenge and question the team leader, or ask questions concerning if the team has the right purpose or is making progress. Team members might also have problems with each other or question their particular roles on the team. Many teams never recover from the storming stage and team members simply make do, becoming a group of individuals instead of a close-knit high performance team. Those who push through the storming stage grow together through the tension and enter into the performing stage. In this stage each person begins to accomplish tasks produced through shared work and interdependence. Members see conflict as an opportunity to grow together and work more effectively rather than to experience times of constant division and despair.

Another way to understand the different stages of team development is to see how small groups move through formation, exploration, transition, action, birthing, and termination.³ The transition stage is when conflict arrives, and only afterwards in the action and birthing stage can team members enter into authentic relationship with others where they express feelings, use their gifts, take ownership, and accept challenges. This stage is similar to a marriage that begins with a honeymoon period, when the couple is deep in love, and there are few problems. However, conflict generally follows the honeymoon, when the reality of differences sets in, and the couple has to work together as a team to become one flesh. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that

³Bill Donahue, and Russ Robinson, *Walking the Small Group Tightrope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 104-105.

teams follow a similar process, and the team members must not give up hope during the storming stage.

Causes of Team Conflict

In order to offer significant solutions to team conflict, one must examine the contributing causes. Even though there are endless possibilities that could be considered causes of team conflict, experience has shown that various reoccurring themes are at the heart of conflict. One recurring theme is unmatched expectations. Many missionaries arrive to the field with a different set of expectations than the team leader and existing team members. The new missionary's job description provides some guidance, but is by no means an exhaustive list of what others think he or she should be doing. For example, it is easy for new personnel to want to travel and take trips throughout Western Europe, because there is much to see. However, there are certain times of the year that are better than others for taking vacation, because people are more open to the gospel during specific times like Christmas and Easter. The team leader must clarify the expectations of when the appropriate times to travel are.

Another factor in expectations is how missionaries have to live up to those who have come before them. This is difficult because no matter how much they try, they could never be the same as the memory of a previous worker. It is important that there is face-to-face communication about these matters in the beginning, so that there might not be as many misunderstandings down the road. Imagine if "missionary Bob" had made plans to go to the States for an extended time during Christmas and the team had already planned various evangelistic get-togethers. When Bob talked to the team leader about his travel plans, the team leader said that it was not the best time to go, because there were team events that were previously planned. Bob becomes resentful, because he did not know about this expectation

from the team leader. It would have been better if the team leader could have talked to Bob before going away for Christmas was even a possibility. It is essential to talk about job, personal, and spiritual expectations during the beginning stages of a new assignment, as well as on a continual basis, because missionary work and one's role can quickly change.

Another possible cause in conflict on teams is principle-centered conflict. This kind of conflict is a disagreement over a particular methodology, ideology, or philosophy.⁴ The two parties might get along personally, but they have differing positions concerning a certain issue. People with experience in ministry have a tendency to do what they have always done, or do what has worked in the past. One barrier for missionaries coming to Spain from the United States is not to plant American churches or minister with an American mindset. Therefore, possible conflict might come from a missionary wanting to apply a certain strategy that has worked for them before without fully contextualizing the gospel message to be more Spanish than American. It is difficult to separate American Christianity and true biblical faith.

Missionary Bob places a sign on the outside door of his apartment saying: “no smoking or drinking.” While in United States this sign might be harmless, in Spain it would be the same as saying: “I do not want practically any Spaniard to enter my house.” Other missionaries, regardless of how they feel about the use of alcohol, strongly disagree with Bob about putting up the sign. This principle-centered conflict could be the beginning of an on-going tension if not dealt with appropriately.

In dealing with the causes of conflict it is important to note that open conflict might not occur until a mixture of accumulating factors creates a trigger event. After a trigger event

⁴Keith Huttenlocker, *Conflict and Caring* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 86.

occurs, any minor new grievance can contribute to an escalation of the problem.⁵ The parties involved in the conflict might be responding more emotionally to what has previously happened than to the matter at hand. This reality should be kept in mind when examining possible causes of conflict.

Another possible cause of team conflict is personality-centered conflict. It might be a case of general dislike that one person has for another or that one has strong opinions about how the other should speak and act. Maybe a person has significant dissimilarity with another where they find that person's behavior distasteful, inappropriate, or threatening.⁶ Someone might also dislike another person because they are too similar to themselves.

There have been various studies that help people better understand their particular personality. While these personality tests could never fully categorize a complex individual, they do help one to better understand some generalities, which could be contributing factors to team conflict. One personality test that the International Mission Board uses is the Myers-Briggs. This personality inventory divides certain characteristics into four primary distinctions which are: introvert and extrovert; sensing and intuition; thinking and feeling; and judging and perceiving.⁷

Introvert and extrovert refer to attitudes, and how a person receives his or her energy. An extrovert gets energy from being around people, while an introvert receives his or her energy from being alone. Sensing and intuition are perceiving functions where the former receives data primarily from the five senses, and the latter focuses on possibilities through receiving data from

⁵Otomar J. Bartos, and Paul Wehr, *Using Conflict Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 177.

⁶Huttenlocker, 86.

⁷"Myers-Briggs Type Indicator," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, web page; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers-Briggs_Type_Indicator; Internet; accessed 22 December 2006.

what one subconsciously believes to be right. Thinking people and feeling people use these judging functions as filters to make decisions based on logic or what their heart tells them to be right. Judging people tend to like a planned and organized approach to life while perceiving people tend to be more spontaneous. The helpful tool about this personality inventory is that there are extensive explanations on the various combinations of personality types.

Some other helpful personality tests include: Holland Codes; The Big Five Factors; and The Five Temperaments. The Holland Codes are based on six different career types created by psychologist John L. Holland which are: “realistic (hands-on, tool-oriented); investigative (analytical, scientific); artistic (creative, original); enterprising (competitive environments, leadership); and conventional (detail-oriented, organizing).”⁸ The Big Five Factors are: “openness to experience (appreciation for art, emotion, adventure); conscientiousness (a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully); extroversion (draws energy from being around others); agreeableness (being compassionate and cooperative rather than antagonistic towards others); neuroticism (a tendency to easily experience unpleasant emotions like anger, anxiety, or depression).”⁹

The Five Temperaments include: melancholy (tends to be an introverted loner with a low need to control others); choleric (an extroverted leader with a high need to control others and relates to people on his own terms); sanguine (an extrovert who has a high need to be included and close to others balancing both control and dependency); phlegmatic (ambiverted person who enjoys both social interaction and time alone, being a mixture of melancholy and sanguine); and supines (sometimes referred to as an introverted sanguine - they have a desire to serve with a

⁸“Holland Codes,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, web page; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holland_Codes; Internet; accessed 22 December 2006.

⁹“Big Five Personality Traits,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, web page; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Five_personality_traits; Internet; accessed 22 December 2006.

gentle spirit, but sometimes expect others to know how they feel and hide their hurt feelings).¹⁰

Knowing one's personality helps teams determine the cause of a particular conflict as well as aid in taking preventative measures for team conflict.

Preventive Measures for Team Conflict

The best way to resolve team conflict many times is to have preventive measures in place that all team members help to create and have agreed upon. Teams should have an understanding that not all conflict needs direct confrontation. One has to ask if the issue is worth direct communication. Missionary Bob, who is a church planter, might not agree with missionary Fred, who is the business administrator, about the color of the mission vehicle to which Bob has been assigned. Bob has to ask himself if this issue is really worth fighting for. Many times missionaries enter into a conflict for no reason and emotions become so high that later no one can remember what they were fighting about. Proverbs 20:3 says: "It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. (NIV)" Another way of putting it is: "a bulldog could beat a skunk in a fight any day, but it just ain't worth it."¹¹

One helpful tool in preventing team conflict is to have self-awareness on how each member handles differences.¹² When missionary Bob has a conflict with missionary Linda, chances are they will each handle the situation differently according to their particular conflict management style. Communicologists Blake and Moulton suggest five styles of conflict

¹⁰"Five Temperaments," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, web page; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Temperaments; Internet; accessed 22 December 2006.

¹¹Kenneth O. Gangel, and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 34.

¹²"Team Communication and Conflict Resolution," GITT Core Curriculum 2001, web page; available from www.gitt.org/files/Chapter_4.pdf; Internet; accessed 10 December 2006.

management: forcing, confrontation, smoothing, avoiding, and compromise.¹³ One conflict style inventory useful for teams to take and evaluate that use these five styles is “The Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory.”¹⁴ Teams can better deal with conflict through knowing each team member’s particular conflict style.

The behaviors in each conflict style could be better understood by the use of an animal.¹⁵ The “turtle” approaches conflict through avoidance, which might happen through physical withdrawal or silence. The “teddy bear” is accommodating and seeks to preserve the relationship at all cost. This person will often take quick steps to resolve the conflict and will even take the blame, believing the relationship is more significant than any particular problem.

The “owl” is collaborating, seeking everybody's participation in defining the conflict and working toward solutions. This person looks for mutually agreed-upon steps that please the majority of the people involved in the conflict. The “fox” is compromising and desires to facilitate a little bit of winning to each of the parties involved. This person must use persuasion and negotiation where team members give and take to produce an agreed upon solution. The last animal is the “shark” that primarily focuses on winning. This competitive person is aggressive and domineering, seeking his or her personal goals over the relationship.¹⁶

There are various key team-building principles important to preventing conflict before it ever happens. Teams must have a clear, common purpose that is important to individual team

¹³R. R. H. Shephard Blake and J. S. Moulton, *Manging Intergroup Conflict in Industry* (Houston: Gulf Press, 1964).

¹⁴“Conflict Modes,” Consulting Psychologists Press, web page; available from http://www.cpp.com/products/tki/conflict_modes.asp; Internet; accessed 22 December 2006.

¹⁵Norman Shawchuck, *How to Manage Conflict in the Church*, vol. 1 (Irvine, Calif.: Spiritual Growth Resources, 1983), 22.

¹⁶Gangel and Canine, 239-243.

members. Team leaders should provide an intensive orientation and ongoing supervision outlining the team's master plan and the team member's specific role in the overall goals.¹⁷

Team members should seek to attain crystal clear roles that are “clear, complete, compatible, complementary, and consensual.”¹⁸ Accepted leadership is important where the team leader looks to serve rather than be served. Teams ought to have effective team processes in which they think and work together in unity. The members can use their talents and experiences in order to make effective use of their differences and view diversity as a strength instead of a weakness.¹⁹

Missionaries working on teams should form solid relationships through trust, understanding, acceptance, respect, courtesy, and mutual accountability, where team members learn how to work together despite their differences. Excellent communication is a necessity, which stems from cooperation and listening to fellow team members. True communication can happen when team members create operating principles that hold everyone in check in how they respond to each other. Part of communication is sharing information that would help team members make better decisions, which facilitates motivation and creates trust.²⁰

Team members should expect exceptional results through everyone working together producing synergy, which happens when the individual parts contribute together to produce a total greater than the sum of the parts (i.e. $1 + 1 = 4$). Individual team members' goals must line up with the team purpose. It is important to remember that team members are volunteers (even if

¹⁷Dale Galloway, *Building Teams in Ministry* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2000), 138.

¹⁸Pat MacMillan, *The Performance Factor* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 82.

¹⁹Glenn M. Parker, *Cross-Functional Teams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 17.

²⁰Ken Blanchard, Alan Randolph, and Peter Grazier, *Go Team* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 55.

they are full-time paid staff), and the team leader is a servant leader.²¹ The habits of a servant leader following the example of Jesus are: “solitude; prayer; study and application of Scripture; accepting and responding to God's unconditional love; and involvement in support of relationships.”²² These habits have a direct relationship to the team leader becoming a person of peace when everything around him seems to be in conflict.

Building trust is another key preventive measure for team conflict. George Cladis says one can build trust through a practical living out of community based on Trinitarian theology, which he defines as the “perichoresis of God”, meaning “circle dance.”²³ Many teams on the mission field today do not work together in trust where missionaries use their vast gifts in a divine “circle dance” to extend God’s kingdom. They create an environment of distrust or “slam dance” instead of “circle dance”, which leads to team conflict. Trust can be achieved through mutuality, sharing, giving, and intimacy brought together in authentic honesty. This honesty is the foundation of “experiencing the ability of the Spirit of God to forgive and transcend our brokenness, in process of repair, and weave us into intimate fellowship.”²⁴

Trust is not only built in times of celebration and community but is strengthened in times of conflict. “It’s in the crucible of conflict that the refiner’s fire matures relationships. It’s when conflicts are resolved that strength and stability are created in relationships. . .when we learn lessons individually and collectively that chip away at the brittle areas and bring out our very best.”²⁵

²¹MacMillan, 29-30.

²²Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead like Jesus* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005), 154.

²³George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 113.

²⁴Cladis, 115.

²⁵Macchia, 68.

Solutions for Resolving Team Conflict

There are various solutions for resolving team conflict, which help the team grow together to become the body of Christ. Depending on whether the conflict is positive or negative determines the possible solution. A positive form of conflict is when team members disagree with a particular course of action, but they work together to come up with a solution they can all agree on. Negative conflict can be defined as tension that disrupts the team from doing its work. Negative conflict might come primarily from an individual member on the team or might be a shared team issue. The team leader should not be as involved in positive conflict, but the team members want the leader to intervene with negative conflict.²⁶

When the conflict relates specifically to work priorities, then the team can implement the following four-step process:

1. The team members fully agree on the team purpose and have a common goal.
2. The team looks at all the areas of agreement.
3. The team determines if the differences are interfering with the overall work.
4. Team members can bring up concerns about other members and agree on a set of protocols in how to relate to one another.²⁷

The biblical model in resolving conflict can be understood by applying the four Gs: glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31); get the log out of your eye (Matt. 7:5); gently restore (Gal. 6:1); and go and be reconciled (Matt. 5:24).²⁸ Team members must have a deep desire to bring honor to God and draw on His grace. One can glorify God through following the example of Jesus Christ, and putting His teachings into practice through being totally selfless. Jesus teaches that a person must accept his or her own contribution to the conflict before focusing in on what others have done. When a team member overlooks others' wrongs and admits his or her own faults, the

²⁶Theresa Kline, *Remaking Teams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 43-44.

²⁷Kline, 102-103.

²⁸Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 12.

other team members will often have a similar response. At times, if others do not see how they have contributed to a conflict, one should graciously show them their fault. Being a peacemaker involves reconciliation, which is a commitment to restore the damaged relationship.²⁹ With a strong biblical foundation in place, one can then examine the many practical aspects for resolving team conflict.

In order to understand how to apply the principles for conflict resolution, it is necessary to address practical helps during the conflict. One practical help is to speak the truth in love: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”³⁰ Ed Silvano says that speaking “the truth without love is like giving someone a good kiss when you have bad breath. No matter how good your kiss is, all the recipient will remember is your bad breath.”³¹ Often team members bring up grievances, which might be totally true, but they do it with bad breath. One must strive to patiently speak the truth but with positive body language, an uplifting tone, and a godly spirit.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us of what true love is in the body of Christ: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”³²

²⁹Sande, 12-13.

³⁰Ephesians 4:15-16 (Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society).

³¹Ed Silvano, *Prayer Evangelism* (Ventura, Regal Books, 2000), 40-41.

³²1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society).

This chapter is frequently quoted at weddings, which certainly is a valid application, but it is important to recognize that Paul put this chapter directly after dealing with the different spiritual gifts and how the church must work together to form the body of Christ.

Here are some common approaches for conflict resolution:

1. Welcome the existence of the conflict, bring it into the open, and use it as potential for change.
2. Separate the person from the problem in an effort to diffuse the emotional component of the conflict by showing respect, listening carefully, and giving all parties an opportunity to express views.
3. Clarify the nature of the problem as seen by both parties. Is this the real problem?
4. Deal with one problem at a time, beginning with the easier issues.
5. Listen with understanding (interest) rather than evaluation. Use the communication skills of listening, reflecting, and clarifying.
6. Attack data, facts, assumptions, and conclusions but not individuals (e.g., “I disagree with your assumptions”).
7. Brainstorm about possible solutions.
8. Use objective criteria when possible.
9. Invent new solutions where both parties gain.
10. Implement the plan, and evaluate and review the problem-solving process after implementing the plan.
11. Identify areas of agreement, and focus on common interests, not positions.³³

Communication skills are essential to resolving team conflict. In the conflict many people feel threatened or that they are being personally attacked, so it is necessary to establish an environment of trust through effective communication. One communication skill is active listening, which can be accomplished through careful attention to a person's words, tone, facial expressions, and body language. An active listener waits patiently, maintains regular eye contact, leans forward slightly to show interest, eliminates distractions, and suggests occasional acknowledgments of “hmmm” or “uh-huh.” He or she also clarifies statements by paraphrasing

³³“Team Communication and Conflict Resolution,” GITT Core Curriculum 2001, web page; available from www.gitt.org/files/Chapter_4.pdf; Internet; accessed 10 December 2006.

and offering statements of agreement.³⁴ Another important communication skill is being assertive. Assertiveness is not the same as aggression. An assertive person addresses the issue and shows regard for the opinions of others, not pretending there is not a problem.³⁵

Team members should use reframing, which is a strategy to change a person's perception of the nature of the conflict. One uses reframing when he or she puts a positive frame on a conflict, focusing on the beneficial aspects of the change rather than the negative concerns. Timeliness, clarity, and accuracy are also important factors to help keep all parties involved in the conflict well informed.³⁶ One should use open questions that facilitate a response and dialogue rather than closed questions that are answered quickly and provide limited responses like a simple “yes or no” answer. It is helpful to offer clarifying responses where the team members make sure they understand what has been said.³⁷

If team conflict gets to the point where the individual team members or the team leader cannot resolve the issue, it might be necessary to use a third party who is outside of the situation. Different third parties are needed depending on the scope and damage of the specific team conflict. An expert or consultant might need to be brought in to offer expertise and give advice to the different parties involved in the conflict. On the mission field this might be the member care personnel for the region who has professional training in counseling and interpersonal relationships. Another possibility might be to request a facilitator who assists with communication between the parties in conflict. This person might not be a trained professional

³⁴Sande, 166-169.

³⁵David W. Kale, *Managing Conflict in the Church* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2003), 100-102.

³⁶Kale, 102-103.

³⁷“Team Communication and Conflict Resolution,” GITT Core Curriculum 2001, web page; available from www.gitt.org/files/Chapter_4.pdf; Internet; accessed 10 December 2006.

but has an understanding of group process skills. The team leader who facilitates communication with two team members could fulfill this role.³⁸

A similar role to a facilitator is a mediator, who is a third party who assists in the negotiation of a conflict. The mediator does not have the authority to decide the outcome of those involved but helps the members work through the various issues using specific skills and strategies. If the conflict is extremely damaging to the team, it might be necessary to bring in a healer who helps the members work through the various causes of the conflict. This person also addresses the emotional and spiritual implications of the conflict. On the mission field this person might be a work supervisor for the country or specific region. Another third party that might be needed is an arbitrator, who hears the evidence from the conflicting parties and decides a resolution for them. This person might be someone in leadership from the regional team who has to come and address a serious issue.³⁹

The book *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande offers a biblical guide to resolving personal conflict and helps specifically in the area of confession. Sande lays out seven principles known as the “Seven A’s”, which help team members talk to each other about conflict concerns. One should: “address everyone involved, avoid words like ‘if, but, maybe’, admit specifically, acknowledge the hurt, accept the consequences, alter your behavior, and ask for forgiveness (and allow time).”⁴⁰ One major factor in conflict resolution is the individual’s overall attitude during the entire process. If a team member does not want to resolve the issue or thinks he or she has no

³⁸Allan Edward Barsky, *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions* (Belmont: Wadsworth Brooks/Cole, 2000), 4-7.

³⁹Barsky, 7-11.

⁴⁰Sande, 126-133.

fault in what has happened, it would be very difficult for there to be peace and reconciliation on the team.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are absolute necessities for a team to fully resolve the conflict and to be able to look to a future where team members can closely work together. Colossians 3:13 says: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”⁴¹ In order to forgive as God forgives us, one must draw on His strength and power. Forgiveness is an act of will, which involves a series of decisions where an individual decides to bestow grace on another. A person must decide to let go of the offense and give favor unconditionally to another.⁴² In order for there to be healing in team conflict, team members must forgive one another and move forward.

Forgiveness is a process, and when a team member continually works through that process, they can experience reconciliation (Matt. 5:24; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). “The essence of reconciliation is the construction of lasting peaceful relations between formal rivals based on genuine support by the majority of the group members. Reconciliation, then, requires the formation of new beliefs, attitudes, motivations, goals, and emotions that support the peaceful relations.”⁴³ Reconciliation can only happen if you give other team members the opportunity to regain your trust. One must offer reconciliation in thought, in word, and in deed. The team member should not try to relive the offenses by continuing dwelling on the painful feelings of the conflict, but ask God to change his or her heart through prayer. One can apply the replacement principle, which seeks to replace negative thoughts and memories with positive

⁴¹Colossians 3:13 (Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society).

⁴²Sande, 204-208.

⁴³Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 37.

ones. For example, when a negative thought about a particular team member comes up, one can pray and think about what is good about that person.⁴⁴

Reconciliation through one's word happens when a person does not take the opportunity to talk bad about others but makes a point to speak well of them. The replacement principle can be applied to one's actions as well. C.S. Lewis says “don't waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

One of the major factors why missionaries leave the field is conflict with fellow team members and/or their supervisor. God desires to see missionaries be an example of authentic Christian community to the nations, sharing with each other in love, trust, forgiveness, and reconciliation. As missionary teams work together in perfect community being the body of Christ towards the common goal of making disciples of all peoples, God will grant his blessing and bestow his power. Teams can experience the Savior's unity and peace in team conflict through carefully examining team dynamics that contribute to conflict, causes of team conflict, preventive measures for team conflict, and solutions for resolving team conflict.

⁴⁴Sande, 219-222.

⁴⁵C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 116.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think missionaries struggle with preventing and resolving team conflict?
2. Have you seen the “forming, norming, storming, and performing” stages on previous teams you have been on? Were you able to reach the performing stage?
3. From your experience what are the main causes of team and/or personal conflict?
4. Talk about your personality. How does your personality help or hinder you in preventing and resolving conflict?
5. Which of the five styles of conflict management (forcing, confrontation, smoothing, avoiding, and compromise) do you identify with? How can you have a more balanced approach to dealing with conflict?
6. What Biblical passages do you find the most helpful for resolving conflict?
7. What communication skills do you need to work on?
8. What do you find to be the most helpful principles to conflict resolution?

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