



SBMA'S MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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"The Voice of the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia Building Material Industry."

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Why is conflict-avoidance is so bad?

OSHA's statute of limitations

Congress has authorized OSHA to issue citations and penalties under the General Duty Clause and under any standard, rule, or order. This authorization can be found in Section 9 of the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act (the OSH Act), 29 U.S.C. § 658.

In a letter of interpretation dated May 4, 2001, OSHA says that "Congress authorized OSHA to issue penalties, if appropriate, when hazards are first discovered." However, Section 9 also states that "[n]o citation may be issued... after the expiration of six months following the occurrence of any violation."

In other words, in those instances where OSHA will issue citations, it must generally do so within six months from the date the violation occurred.

As a result, OSHA must generally issue citations within six months from the date it first discovers the violation during an inspection. Where the actions or omissions of the employer concealed the existence of the violation, however, this six-month period is tolled until such time that OSHA learns or could have learned of the violation.

How to Resolve Conflict With Grace and Style

By Dr. Alice Waagen
[Workforce Learning](#)

In the years that I have been teaching managers, certain themes recur.

For example, when I hear managers cite poor communication and rampant gossip, I know that employees are acting out with aggression in response to some kind of internal warfare because they feel that their ideas or concerns are not being heard — or taken seriously.

When they tell me, "Conflict is avoided here," I know they are stifling disagreements, but then back-channeling the issues through others. This form of passive resistance always leads to passive-aggressive behavior — and this is the unhealthiest behavior for the organization as a whole.

But it's understandable that conflict-avoidance is the current *modus operandi* at many companies today. The rotten economy has contributed to folks not being comfortable challenging others. Fear of losing a job, or damaging a reputation, can



Control your reaction.



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cause people to swallow their concerns or objections and declare agreement on issues when, in fact, they couldn't disagree more.

Why is conflict-avoidance so bad?

As you can imagine, all of this suppressed frustration takes its toll. In the extreme, a culture of conflict-avoidance creates organizations that muddle along with an entrenched status quo. Endless meetings result in discussions without decisions, and when decisions are made, they are soon undermined and revoked. Then it is back to more meetings to discuss the same issue — again and again.

Senior leaders become highly frustrated because no issue is ever brought to completion. Managers are frustrated, of course, because they spend their days on what feels like an endless treadmill of talking about issues that never get resolved.

You can break the cycle.

The healthy approach to resolving conflict is to pick your battles wisely, let go of those that are of little value, and find a middle ground when appropriate.

When I work with organizations that deal with conflict in this productive way, I help them master a series of management practices that use conflict and disagreement productively. Here's how it works:

1. Control your reaction. Individuals choose their reaction to conflict based on the particulars of the problem being discussed. Select an approach from these options:

- **Sublimation:** I give up my needs and issues and let you win.
- **Assertiveness:** I express my needs and issues to see if there is a workable compromise or collaboration
- **Aggression:** I express my need as being more important than the needs and issues of others.

2. Keep a decision journal. At the end of every meeting, simply record what decisions were made, the date they were made, and all who supported or dissented. Review the journal periodically to see if the decisions withstood the test of time.

Remember, when conflict is avoided, the opposing viewpoints are not aired but suppressed for the sake of appearing to agree. When information is withheld, decisions are then based on missing or faulty premises. These decisions have a short shelf life and are soon seen to be flawed. Then it is back to the drawing board. If you keep a journal, you'll be able to track this better, so you can break the cycle.

3. Stay in control. If an unhealthy number of decisions are remanded over time, review the participant involvement and votes and answer these questions:

- Did we know all relevant information when making the decision?
- If not, what was missing? Did someone on the team have this information but fail to bring it forth? Why?
- Were there any dissenting voices? How were they treated?
- What needs to change to make the decision-making process safe for open and productive disagreement?
- Do certain individuals habitually take on one reaction to conflict, either

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Our economy is proof-positive that history repeats itself.

aggression or submission, regardless of the issue? These individuals need to broaden their approach to disagreement by learning new conflict-management approaches.

The bottom line: No one likes to work in an environment of frequent battles and endless arguments. But the false peace of suppressed needs is artificial and ultimately even more destructive. Healthy organizations welcome and support disagreement and discussion that results in sound decisions. Embrace it.

Inc.

Managing Uncertainty in an Economic Downturn

By Jamie Walters

Our economy is proof-positive that history repeats itself. Over the course of every decade or so, the economy seems to slump, recover, and boom. As we await the up-swing, leaders and managers must tend to themselves and employees to ensure that fear, turnover, "survivor's syndrome," lack of hope, and sinking morale don't sabotage performance or damage the company culture. Once these occur, the company's prospects for turning the corner of this latest downturn sink, too. Both leaders and employees can take steps to encourage positive mindset management and peak performance during this current cycle when the economy seems listless.

What Leaders Can Do

Skillful leaders will stay abreast on their reading about the economy and remain tuned in to the organization's strategy and status. They'll also honestly and effectively communicate economic realities and the resulting company strategy, as well as a vision for how the company and its people can emerge stronger when the economy begins to lift. As a leader, you can rejuvenate yourself and shore up your positive thinking by:

Focusing on your vision: Fear-based decisions, such as slashing every expense to the bare bone, can immediately redirect your organization's course, in addition to instilling fear in stakeholders (employees, investors, etc.) If these constituencies joined your company because of its vision, they'll most likely stay because you maintained it, even through the tough times. On a personal level, the organization's vision is a manifestation of who you are and how you want to operate. Use it as a source of inspiration and a touchstone that grounds you when you're feeling unsettled and unsure of what to do next.

Using tension as creative fuel: Stress is an inevitable outcropping of economic downturns. However, stress is also the foreshadowing of innovative breakthroughs and tremendous ideas. Channel any tension you might be experiencing into brainstorming sessions or solution-based thinking. These activities and their resulting action also help reduce stress. Start with the question, "If we don't want this, then what do we want?"

Spending "found time" on new adventures: Slower business cycles allow you to attend to the ideas, professional development, and business-maintenance that you always wished you had time for. Use this time to reconnect with your vision, to develop specific areas of your business, to improve on what you're already doing well, etc. Build these activities into your weekly rhythm, ensuring that they remain



Leaders cannot and should not try to steer the ship solo.



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when your enterprise is flush with business again. Why? They are the cornerstones of a fulfilled leader and a successful business.

Revisiting successful approaches from the past: This is most likely not the first downturn that you've experienced. Reflect on the approaches that have worked well in the past, and that suit your vision, to earn new business. This thought-technique also strengthens your self-confidence, allowing you to see that you've successfully weathered storms in the past, and will again.

Help Employees to Help You

Leaders cannot and should not try to steer the ship solo. Employees are the people who help put your vision and strategy into action. Your positive, productive mindset will go only so far without the employee complement. To help employees manage the uncertainty of an economic downturn, try these tips:

Communicate consistently & honestly: Without straightforward, ongoing communication about the company direction and next steps, employees will fill the information void with fear-based projections. Understand that every business has a grapevine of communication, and if you don't feed it, someone else will. Your honesty will help to engender confidence with employees, which can increase loyalty and quell uncertainty.

Ensure employees reconnect with the vision: Employees are invested in your vision, too. Give them the opportunity to reconnect with the vision as a group, refuel with its message and recalibrate their actions to its purpose. You'll have a team of aligned people focused on the same positive goal, and a heightened awareness of what the group is doing and why.

Encourage employees to explore the possibilities: Unleash all creative juices and brainstorm with employees how you can make your vision a reality. Don't just "think outside the box" - throw the box away altogether. Fresh ideas, stretched minds, and energetic interactions can lead to higher morale, cohered teams, a keen focus on what's most important, and a clearer picture of desired opportunities (allowing you to better recognize them when they appear).

Quote of the Week

As Mahatma Gandhi said: *"It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result."*