Having Difficult Conversations/Managing Conflict

Conflict is unavoidable. Not only are we all different, with a different hierarchy of values, and different desires and fears but we live in a broken world and our own sinfulness is never far from the surface. We are all blind and self-deceived in some areas. While we want to be judged on our intentions it's our words and actions (or inaction) that can damage. All this makes communication challenging as both the speaker and the hearer are contributing their perspectives when interpreting the message.

Conflict is challenging but it also provides significant opportunities to grow in Christlikeness, bring glory to God in the midst of hard circumstances, and to bear the burdens of others.

Conflict can become untenable if not managed well. Conflict managed well can result in strengthened relationships and an increased respect between the parties.

Think through how you'll manage conflict in any given context. All contexts call upon you as the Rector/Pastor/Leader to approach the situation with Christ-like leadership, humility and grace.

Quick tips

Don't avoid addressing the issue. It will only fester and grow tension in the team, or manifest in other ways. Timing is everything. The sooner you address a matter (whether it is to call out an inappropriate behaviour in another, or address a tension) the more likely the matter will be resolved in a congenial, God-honouring way.

Self-assess. With humility, consider if and how you may have contributed to the conflict. Remove your plank! Prepare yourself for feedback and welcome it.

Be empathetic. Understand the situation from each party's perspective. This will help you see the situation as Christ would, with love for the parties and a heavy heart for their pain. These matters are often heightened with emotion. Don't think that you know what's happened. Keep an open mind and an understanding heart. After all, you only know what you only know!

Lead by example. People are watching to see how you deal with conflict. Provide them with a godly, mature model to apply in their own lives. It is often something that we fear, but if we are to create a culture of trust and respect, we must learn to give and receive feedback effectively.

Seek wise counsel. Raise any concerns with a wise Christian leader/friend to identify the best approach to manage the situation.

Embed a culture of feedback

If we work within a team structure built on clear expectations, open and honest feedback and a desire to see each member of the team grow in maturity as they serve God in ministry, then introducing a culture of feedback, by way of regular performance reviews for example, assists the team in numerous ways. Creating this culture must begin with mutual trust and respect. This often occurs when communication is clear and transparent….what I say is what I mean.

This information has been provided as a supplement to The One Thing podcast and should be used as a guide only and not considered formal HR Advice.