VetLead

Stop the Drama! Eliminating Conflict in Your Practice

Staff Video Course Guide

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Welcome to *Stop the Drama! Eliminating Conflict in Your Practice*. This course will help you understand more about how to build the team and the practice you want, specifically when it comes to creating a workplace that is free of conflict. We will discuss why unresolved conflict happens and work through a process together that you can use to resolve the conflicts in your practice.

As you watch the course video with your team, you'll be asked to stop periodically and complete activities. Pages 2-7 provide the instructions for each activity as well as a place to capture your answers. The activity type is indicated by an icon and a bold heading.

Group Activity

Group activities are meant to be completed with your teammates, which means everyone - including you - should participate in the discussion.

Individual Activity

Individual activities are meant to be completed by yourself. Once completed, you may be asked to share your answers with the group.

Paired Activity

Paired activities are meant to be completed with a partner.

In addition to a place to capture your answers to the activities, this course guide includes:

- An overview of key concepts about conflict covered in the course video (pages 8-9).
- The *Eliminating Conflict – Quick Reference* that you can refer to as you practice the techniques discussed in this course (pages 10-11).

We hope you enjoy the content in this course, and that this course guide helps you as you work to eliminate conflict in your practice.

Group Activity

Take a minute to discuss the question below as a group.

What is the difference between these two examples?

Scenario 1

Amanda, a Registered Veterinary Technician, needs someone to hold an animal so she can trim its nails. Everyone seems busy except for Dana, who works at the front desk, so Amanda asks her for help. Dana responds that she's busy working on something for a client, but there aren't any clients in the waiting room.

"It looks like there isn't anyone waiting right now," Amanda says, "and I really need someone to help me with this nail trim. It won't take long at all. Do you think you could wait to finish what you're doing? It would really help me out."

Dana responds that there is a client on hold on the phone who is extremely upset because her dog ate something she thinks might be poisonous. She's working with one of the doctors to fit the animal into the schedule quickly, and can help Amanda as soon as she's done.

Amanda completely understands this and asks Dana to come get her as soon as she's done assisting the client.

Scenario 2

Amanda, a Registered Veterinary Technician, needs someone to hold an animal so she can trim its nails. Everyone seems busy except for Dana, who works at the front desk, so Amanda asks her for help. Dana responds that she's busy working on something for a client, but there aren't any clients in the waiting room.

I guess she's just too lazy to help me, Amanda thinks. *See if I help her next time she needs something.*

She walks off in a huff and later shares what happened with her fellow RVT. "I asked Dana to help me for five minutes," Amanda tells her, "and she refused even though the lobby is completely empty!"

Individual Activity

Answer the following questions individually.

How can interpersonal conflicts interfere with our ability to deliver our best care or service?

_____

_____

_____

How does gossip change our day or our feelings about the people in our practice?

_____

_____

_____

How would our day be different if there were no drama or gossip in our hospital?

_____

_____

_____

If someone has an issue with my behavior or my work, how would I want them to handle it?

_____

_____

_____

Group Activity

Read each of the scenarios below. Then, answer the questions as a group.

Scenario 1

The people who work the night shift never complete all of their work, which means you have to do it for them in the morning. You think they're lazy and inconsiderate. You believe that they don't care that they're making extra work for you.

Scenario 2

Your manager just hired a new associate veterinarian. She doesn't make any effort to talk to people unless she has to, and she always has a pained expression on her face. You think this is because she believes she's better than everyone else.

What else might be causing these actions?

Scenario 1 _____

_____

_____

Scenario 2 _____

_____

_____

Are there other possible reasons for these people's behaviors?

Scenario 1 _____

_____

_____

Scenario 2 _____

_____

_____

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Individual Activity

Answer the following question individually.

Do you have any current conflicts within the practice that need to be resolved for this team to be at its best?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Group Activity

Answer the question below as a group. Assign one person to capture your answers on a flipchart or whiteboard.

What are some opening statements you can use in your practice?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

Paired Activity

Pair up with one other person in your meeting. Then, complete the activity below.

Imagine you need to have a difficult conversation with the person you are paired with. Take turns practicing having this conversation by:

- Opening the conversation with an opening statement of your choice
- Explaining what the conversation is about
- Deciding on the action steps you can take to resolve the conflict

Use the *Eliminating Conflict – Quick Reference* on pages 10-11 to help you plan your conversations.

What pretend conflict do you wan to address with this person?

_____

_____

What will your opening statement be?

_____

_____

How will you explain what the conversation is about?

_____

_____

What action steps can you take to resolve the conflict?

_____

_____

Group Activity

Take a few minutes to think of an answer to the question below. Then, share your answer with the group.

What are 1-2 things you'd like to do differently because you invested this time today?

You can capture any notes about the actions you want to take moving forward in the space below.

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What is "Unresolved" Conflict?

Disagreements happen on most teams. In fact, successful teams are composed of people who have different and diverse thoughts, ideas, opinions, and points of view. Normal, healthy disagreements and differences can help teams to grow and evolve. However, unlike normal differences of opinion, unresolved conflict will cause problems within the team and become detrimental to your practice.

How Unresolved Conflicts Start

Understanding how conflict starts will help you to better identify conflicts as soon as they arise. Inference of negative intent, or assuming someone is acting in a negative way, is the root of all conflict. While simply having these kinds of thoughts may seem harmless, our thoughts dictate our actions.

The *Ladder of Inference* provides a visual representation of how inference of negative intent can influence our actions. First, there are the **reality and facts** of what actually happened. Then, we filter the situation through our **selected reality**. Next, we attach meaning to the situation through our **interpreted reality** and make **conclusions about the intent** of the other person. We make **assumptions** about the other person's motivation and begin to **believe** these assumptions. Finally, these beliefs may lead us to take **actions** that reinforce our inference of negative intent.
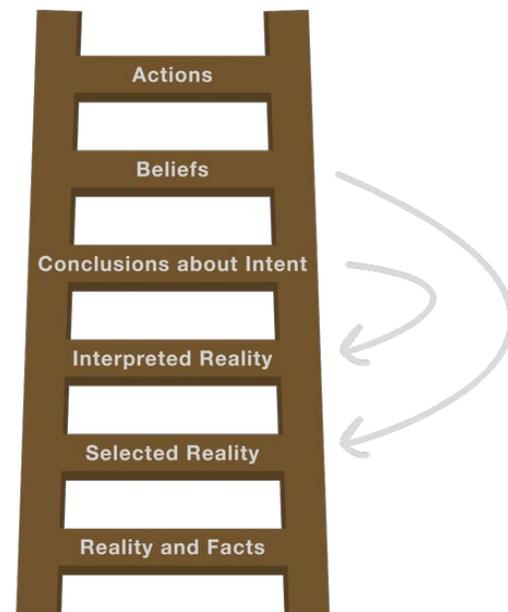
How Unresolved Conflicts Grow

Inferences of negative intent create the conditions for unresolved conflict to arise. Once unresolved conflict has started, gossip and time will help it grow.

Gossip

Gossip creates additional instability and causes more thoughts of negative intent within the practice. Gossip can turn a simple misunderstanding into a toxic situation. When this happens, you may find yourself thinking about the gossip rather than delivering phenomenal care or service.

Time

Time can cause additional strain on a relationship compromised by inference of negative intent. Generally, conflict grows over time even though we often believe it will fade instead.

Eliminating Conflict in Your Practice

Learning how to have respectful conversations about conflict - rather than relying on behaviors like gossiping, letting the problem grow, or expecting your manager to solve the problem for you - has the ability to eliminate unresolved conflict in your practice.

You can successfully execute these conversations by taking the following steps:

- Identifying conflicts as soon as they happen
- Preparing to have a conversation to address the conflict
- Having the conversation and working on solutions
- Practicing until this process becomes a habit

Step #1: Identify Conflicts As Soon As They Happen

Test whether you're jumping to conclusions or making negative assumptions about someone else by asking yourself:
- What else might be causing this action?
- Are there other possible reasons for this person's behavior?

Look for signs that you may be upset like:
- Spending time dwelling on a particular person or situation.
- Finding yourself talking about a particular person or situation to others.
- Having physiological reactions like sweaty palms, a clenched jaw, a racing heart, or tense muscles when you're around a particular person or situation.

Step #2: Prepare to Have a Conversation to Address the Conflict

Prepare an opening statement like, *"I'd like to have a conversation with you about something that's bothering me."*

Decide how you'll explain what the conversation is about by answering questions like:
- What did this person or people do to upset you initially?
- What are they currently doing that you're frustrated with?
- Why are their actions upsetting you?
- How are they making you feel?
- What assumptions are you drawing from these actions?

Consider what you want to get out of the conversation by asking yourself:
- What is the purpose for having this conversation?
- If this conversation is successful, what will happen?

Prepare emotionally by asking yourself questions that will help you consider reasons for this person's actions that may not be negative. For instance:
- Are there any other reasons this person may be behaving this way?
- Can you think of a time when you've behaved this way in the past?
- Is it possible they don't realize how this is making you feel?
- How would you want someone to handle this if they felt this way about you?

ELIMINATING CONFLICT – QUICK REFERENCE

Step #3: Have the Conversation and Work on Solutions

1 Share an opening statement like, *"I'd like to have a conversation with you about something that's bothering me."*

2 Let the other person respond. Are they okay with having the conversation right now, or do they want to wait and have it a bit later?

3 Explain what the conflict is about by sharing the information you prepared in Step #2.

4 Let the other person respond and listen to what they have to say. Good listeners:
- Focus on what the person is trying to communicate.
- Let the person speaking get their entire point out before responding.
- Do not blame the other person for your feelings.
- Use statements like, "*Help me understand that better*," or "*Tell me more about that."*
- Take a timeout if things get emotional.

5 Decide on action steps you can take to resolve the conflict. Decide who will do what, by when, and what results you would like to see because of this action. If you can't come to a consensus, the next step is to have a second conversation at a later date.

Step #4: Practice Until This Process Becomes a Habit

The final step to eliminating conflict is practice. If you're not used to confronting people, or if you're not used to preparing what you'll say and how you'll say it, taking the steps for eliminating conflict may feel strange at first. However, with practice, they'll become easier.

As you practice, focus on your end goal. Remember the environment you're trying to create and know that your actions are helping to make this workplace a reality.