

MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS IN A TIME OF DISCORD

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There is so much noise in the air these days about all the things that separate people, the things that make us different and isolate us from one another. Everyone seems focused on their individual concerns without a commitment to the greater good. Managing employees, shareholders and business relationships can be daunting in this environment. Guiding your business through the turmoil that is in the air these days requires a steady and firm hand.

As many of you know, I belong to Rotary, an organization that is guided by four principles that allow people to find a common ground of action regardless of political, religious or cultural differences. I think these principles are worth keeping in mind when faced with the challenge of resolving disputes in your company and getting people to work together.

1. **Is it the truth?** The core principle of Rotary is adherence to the truth. Determining what is the truth is always harder than it seems it should be when people are stuck in their own perspective, but getting a commitment to seek the truth is a critical first step in finding common ground. It is impossible for anyone to disagree with the idea that honesty is vital part of any relationship. A commitment to speak truthfully and honestly is the first step in building a functioning relationship.

2. **Is it fair to all concerned?** Similarly it's hard for anyone to disagree that everyone should be treated fairly. Most disputes start because people because they feel *they* are not being treated fairly. In resolving a dispute, if an agreement can be reached that everyone should be treated fairly, the next step becomes asking each party what would be fair to the *other* person. Being fair to all concerned requires people to start thinking outside of their own perspective.

3. **Will it be beneficial to all concerned?** When thinking about the resolution to a dispute, require both sides to take into account if the resolution results in each side feeling like their concerns have been addressed. Set the expectation that any resolution will result in both sides knowing that going forward their concerns and issues are being respected in the actions that will be taken in the future.

4. **Will it build goodwill and better friendships?** In the end, a good resolution builds healthier relationships. While not everyone is going to be friends in any organization, if everyone can agree to work in a way that results in feelings of respect and a commitment to honest behavior, goodwill is born and friendship is not a far step. As you look at the proposed resolution, ask whether the process that has been put in place and the commitments that have been given and received are designed to result in respect and honesty between the disputants. If you have reached that point, you will have put into place a resolution that cuts through the noise and distance that seems to separate so many people these days.