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Resolving Human Relations Conflicts

Technical problem-solving focuses on finding causes to the problem. Human relations or managerial problem-solving, on the other hand, focuses on finding solutions, not fault. Concentrating on causes places blame, which is a waste of time and energy. Managing human relations disputes is a 4-step process:

- **DE-EMPHASIZE THE WIN-LOSE ATTITUDE** that intensifies disagreements. This isn't always easy because most people are used to looking at problems as either right or wrong. If hostile feelings are present, wait to discuss matters until the rational mindset returns.
- **CREATE A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE** by emphasizing the common goals shared with the other person. Usually these goals revolve around economic and productivity objectives. Demonstrate a willingness to achieve shared goals and stress the benefits that will result.
- **SIMPLIFY THE CONFLICT.** Reduce emotionally-charged conflicts down to a manageable, simple disagreement by listening more and talking less (since no real dialogue is taking place anyway). When you show respect by listening, they will likely do the same for you. If not, delay an excessively emotional discussion to another time. Spend time collecting information that might be needed when discussion resumes.
- **RESOLVE THE CONFLICT.** To increase the probability of reaching a final agreement, keep 4 objectives in focus:
 1. Get the message across in a nonthreatening manner
 2. Secure an accurate understanding of this message or suggestion
 3. Accurately understand the other person's message
 4. Use a rational problem-solving approach to resolve the conflict. Following is one approach:

Clarifying Solutions To Human Relations Problems

- **DON'T ASK:**
 - "Who caused this problem/situation?"
 - "What caused this problem?"
- **DO ASK:**
 - "What is the disagreement about?"
 - "When does the problem need to be settled?"
 - "What is needed to solve the problem?"
 - "How will the disagreement be settled?"

A Common Myth

A common myth among managers is the belief that quality work is expensive and slows production -- that it is a cost burden rather than a contributor to profit.

As countless case studies show, quality pays by lowering failure costs and by increasing market share through higher quality products and greater attention to customer satisfaction.

There are, of course, irreducible costs associated with managing quality -- things like process control, supplier audits, qualification of new suppliers, etc. But the cost of these activities should be viewed as part of the cost of being in business, just as accounting, engineering, and sales expenses are essential to being in business.

Another common myth is that quality work slows down production. Indeed, it might look like this in the initial stages of implementing an improvement program; however, once it gets started, preventing nonconformances speeds up production and increases productivity.

The Psychology Of Change

Instituting change is one of management's greatest challenges. Below are some basic principles of change:

1. The individual must perceive a need to change
2. The change must be voluntary
3. The change process requires a philosophical basis
4. The change process requires the support of others participating in the same process
5. The process should be broken into steps that can be accomplished in sequence