

Student Leadership Class 4 - Leaders Solve Problems

If you are going to be a leader, you are going to encounter problems. Great leaders are great at solving problems.

Have you ever seen a leader address a problem in a bad way? What affect did it have on the people they were leading?

Can you think of a problem you have seen handled by a leader in a good way? When affect did that have?

Most problems can be can be handled before they even become problems through thoughtful planning and being considerate others. Loving your neighbor as yourself can go a very long way in avoiding problems. However, you will make mistakes, things were happen out of your control, and other people won't have the same amount of care and forethought that you have. When problems arise (and they will), so does an opportunity to be an effective leader.

Be a part of the solution

The severity of a problem and level of your leadership will always determine how you respond to a need. There are problems you can and should solve, there are others that you need to get an adult to address, and there are still others that only the main leader can handle.

However, as a leader, you should always respond to a problem, your response will be determined by your level of leadership and severity of that problem. Too often, problems that rise to a level that a student leader cannot or should not handle could have been addressed before thing got out of hand. Anyone can identify problems, some people are really good at it. Leaders take initiative to solve problems appropriately.

As leader you have three possible responses to needs that arise:

- **Ignore needs** - This should never be an option for someone serious about leadership. When you ignore needs, the health of your organization will suffer.
- **Report needs** - If you only report needs all you will accomplish is created more stress on the leader you report to. Reporting a need is only acceptable when you or other student leaders are not capable of meeting that need on your own.
- **Take care of needs** - This should be your standard response as a leader. Take initiative to solve problems when you can. Solve small problems before they become big ones. If we need more chairs, grab more chairs, get other leaders to help if needed. See someone off by themself? Go introduce yourself, invite them to hang out with you and your friends.

Sometimes things happen that make it unclear if you should handle it or if you should report it. I would rather you attempt to solve these kinds of problems first. You may make a mistake and that is okay. There aren't many mistakes that can't be fixed or easily explained. If you are going to make a mistake, make sure it's a good one. It is also totally acceptable to talk to a leader above you for permission to handle a problem on your own. By doing this you will communicate you want want to take the lead, but are unsure if you can/should handle the problem. Honesty is the best policy.

Keep Short Accounts

If you are going to be a leader, its inevitable you are going to encounter problems with other people. Human nature is inherently selfish and sinful. When you are leading in a place where there are people, that nature will cause problems. Sometimes it will come from others and other times you will be fault. Keeping short accounts is a commitment to solve relationship problems as soon as possible. "Overdrawn" accounts don't go away, the only grow more tension and conflict.

When conflict arises, reflect, pray, and seek God's wisdom before you approach the other person.

The goal should always be to seek a peaceful solution. Here are a few tips to do this well:

- **Don't avoid the person** - People who hold onto their anger eventually spew it out. Don't give the opportunity for a problem to grow into something bigger than it should be. If you know someone is upset with you, consider how you can approach the person to deal with it. Even if you are in the wrong.
- **Listen until their finished** - Good communication requires more listening that speaking. When you talk with people to deal with a problem, listen carefully to all of their concerns. It will be tempting to interrupt or attempt to defend yourself but them speak. You can more appropriately once you have heard everything clearly. Focus on listening, don't be formulating your response while they are speak. This is an honoring way to treat people and often the first step to de-escalating a situation is letting the other person speak.
- **Don't Attack** - Avoid offensive language. Use the word "you" as little as possible. The goal is to have a peaceful solution to problem, not to win an argument or verbally attack them.
- **End with positive comments** - As often as you can end the conversation on a positive note. You may have a great resolution, but when you can't, communicate that you heard and understood them clearly. Leave the door open and possible for further communication.
- **Be careful to avoid division** - Don't attempt to bring others to your side of the conflict. If they are not a part of the problem or solution don't share with them or get them involved.
- **Go to the source** - Most tension begins with a misunderstanding, either by you or them. Misunderstanding can get blown into a frenzy by an overactive imagination, rumors, and gossip. Cut all of that off quickly and go directly to the source of solutions and the conflict.
- **Walk in their shoes** - Many problems happen because of circumstances we don't understand. There are two sides to every story and somewhere in the middle is the actual truth. Look beyond your anger and consider their point of view. Try to see thing from their perspective, this will help you calm down and be less offensive when you speak to other people.
- **Seek wise counsel** - This is not opposite to going to the source. When you seek wise counsel you are not gossiping or trying to get someone else to solve the problem for you. You are trying to bounce the situation off of someone you know and respect. You can do this carefully by speaking in generalities and keeping the discussion from gossip. Whenever possible, seek out someone who is not involved with the conflict.
- **Speak the truth carefully** - Truth can be loving and build a person up or it can be used like hammer to beat a person down. When you are ready to talk about a conflict with the other person, you must do so without being offensive. Confront the issue in private. Always praise in public and confront in private. Be mindful on your attitude, body language, and words. Speak in a nonthreatening tone. Take ownership for you part in the conflict and ask for forgiveness.

Conflict Resolution is a great tool for leaders because...

- Relationships that survive conflict are always stronger
- You will be relieved of stress, anger, and frustration
- It develops knowledge and skills to avoid and handle future problems

In your own words why is resolving conflict a pessary thing?

How can resolving conflict make your relationships better with this you have a problem with?

What about keeping short accounts seems most difficult to do?

What part do think is most important for you?

Argue without being defensive

This can be tricky and is definitely easier said than done. It is very difficult to argue your point without causing additional conflict. The best way to attempt this is to seek to understand the other side. Here are a few tips to do that:

- **Take notes** - Don't formulate your response while the other person is talking. Often this will cause you get stuck on a comment and you will either interrupt or stop listening. This is a learned skill. When you can, jot down a key word or thought you have and continue listening. This will help you remember what you want to say when its your turn to talk and you can listen to them fully.
- **Ask clarifying questions** - When a person knows you genuinely want to understand their position they often become less intense. Most problems arise from misunderstand or poor communication, by asking them question you both can come to the same understand of the problem. It may be their was not really a problem at all, just a misunderstanding that got out of hand. Also, by dialoguing with them about their position may help them see something they had not considered previously. By talking through issues calmly and respectfully you will bring the tension down and make a resolution easier to reach.
- **Point out similarities** - What do you agree on? Do you ultimately share the same go but go down different roads to get there? Often we disagree on the method but have the same goal. Arguments are much easier to solve when we have the same goal.
- **Consider a compromise** - When you are willing to compromise, you show that you value the others persons point of view and want to diffuse the tension. As both of you lower you defenses, you will almost always be able to reach a solution to join forces, create a new plan, or merge your ideas together.

Defensiveness always escalates conflicts. A Calm and thoughtful approach will deflate anger. Defensiveness triggers pride and determination, understanding encourages a compromise.

Have you ever been in an argument that got out hand?

What did you do that escalated that argument?

What could you have done differently to produce a better outcome?

Stop Rumors

Everybody loves a good rumor. Many people feed off of gossip. News and social media companies make or lose millions of dollars just because of rumors.

How have you seen rumors cause problems for people?

How do you react to rumors?

Rumors can destroy a person, ministry, or other organization. Here are tips to deal with rumors:

- **Dispel a rumor by sharing truth** - If you know the truth behind a rumor, share it (if you can confidently) or you can say “you don't have the correct information and shouldn't be talking about that situation.”
- **Invite the subject of the rumor into the conversation** -If the person is nearby or easily available, invite them into the conversation to talk about what is being said about them. You will be amazed how quickly the gossiping stops when they are present.
- **Change the subject** - If you are in a conversation and a rumor comes up, you can say “we shouldn't be talking about that because I am not a part of the solution or the conflict.” Yes it's abrupt, but it is effective. Often people will respect you for being willing to say that and at least they will know the kind of person you are and the integrity you have.

Is the conflict worth it?

Within every problem there is an opportunity to either tear someone down or build them up. How you choose to deal with conflicts will affect the outcome and will determine your effectiveness as a leader.

Before you choose to respond to a conflict consider if it is worth spending your time on it. Don't avoid the problem if there is one, but is it worthy your time and energy to address it. If you decide it is worth your attention consider how to best approach the situation. The way you choose to address a problem is just as important as deciding which problems you will address.

Its Biblical!

James 1:19

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

Proverbs 15:1

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Romans 12:17-18

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Matthew 5:9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Philippians 2:4

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Proverbs 16:7

When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Ephesians 4:26

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

These are just some of the many verses in the Bible that apply to conflict.

What are your thoughts about the practical things we talked about and the truth of scripture?

What areas of conflict resolution do you know you need to work on?

What is at least one practical commitment you can make today to be better at handling conflict in the future?