



## *Fight!! Flight!! Now What?...by David Jones, University of Florida*

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Sure you've been best friends since third grade. You've probably spent as many nights at their house as you have at yours. It was going to be the greatest. You and them, on the same team...it couldn't get any better. Then it happened. You have an argument, a fight, you can't agree. What do you do? Does the team fall apart? Does one of you quit? Where do you go from here?

Luckily it's not the end of the world. Who knows, this might be a good thing for the team. Team conflict and resolution is a challenge every team must face at one time or another. Sometimes it's an issue the entire team disagrees on, other times there's conflict between certain individuals on the team. Either way it can be a destructive or a powerful effect on the team depending on how you the leader deal with it.

Every team creates a set of "norms" that each person within the team functions around. These norms guide how the members of the team act and how the team solves problems. These norms are powerful. These norms can be helpful in guiding the team, but they can also be destructive. When the team is able to understand how each person acts within the team it is easier to predict when and where trouble might arise. Some of these norms include the team member that is always talking and suggesting ideas, thoughts, or opinions to the exclusion of others. You have some members of the team that sit back and take in all the information and then voice their opinion. Some team members are workers. These members just like to be told what to do and then they go and do it. Conflict arises when members invade someone else's "norms" and challenges these norms or makes the team member feel uncomfortable.

Depending on how much the team members like each other will determine how often these norms are challenged or stepped on. But what happens when conflict does arise? It's important to realize conflict doesn't have to be a bad thing. Conflict often encourages discussion, brings issues to the foreground and is a way of coming up with alternative ways of looking, thinking and doing different things. Depending on how the team address's the conflict will determine how the conflict affects the team.

There are several ways to address a challenge or conflict within a team. The first way is to try and avoid or smooth over the problem. When doing this typically team members try to withdraw in order avoid the conflict. Usually this type of conflict resolution doesn't lead to a solution. Usually the status quo is maintained and the problem remains. Sometimes this strategy actually increases tension within the team.

You can try to bargain or force your way out of a conflict. This technique involves the "loudest" one wins. You have the most aggressive team member forcing their opinions, thoughts or ideas onto the rest of the group. The attitude is "I must win" in order to have the challenge or conflict resolved. This manner of conflict resolution is typically very detrimental to teams and leads to more animosity among the team and more conflict in the future.



Finally, a third way to resolve a conflict is by taking the issue head on and finding a solution to the problem. Sometimes people use the term “let’s clear the air” when they use this technique. There is an attempt to bring all the issues out so that everyone knows what is being discussed. All team members involved with the conflict are allowed to express their feelings in regards to the conflict. This type of conflict resolution can be extremely helpful. There are no longer any hidden secrets within the team. Each member involved has had the opportunity to express him or herself and hopefully feels that they have been heard. One of the nicest things about this form of conflict resolution is that the people involved in the conflict are also the ones that figure out how to solve the problem. Let the team members express their feelings and then let them determine the best possible solution.

Some key items to think about when trying to resolve conflicts within your team:

1. Make sure you have all the members involved in the conflict involved in the resolution process. If all members don’t have buy-in nothing will be resolved.
2. The team members that are involved in the conflict need to be accepting of their role in the conflict and want to “fix” the problem. If the team members don’t see that there is a problem, they won’t see that they need to do anything to fix something that isn’t broken.
3. Make sure that all team members “listen” to each other. Often times if each side really “hears” and “understands” the other sides position it clears up much of the conflict is cleared up on it’s own.
4. Remember that once a decision is made, all members need to agree to the decisions and agree to live and work toward the ultimate goal – To Be A Successful Team.

Now that thoughts, ideas, concerns and challenges have been brought out to the group it is time to take action. Use the ideas and thoughts to help the team get better. Use the situation to prevent a similar one in the future. Make this a learning experience. Good leadership facilitates good teamwork, so teamwork and leadership go hand-in-hand. By looking at how your team is functioning and working together, you can help in making it run smoother and be more productive. Use challenges to create a learning environment for each and every team member. One last bit of advice...don’t be afraid to ask for help. Your advisor is a great resource to help you out when things are looking bleak. More then likely they have run into this challenge before and will be able to offer some suggestions for working it out. Good Luck.

