
Leadership Academy: Conflict Management

Transcript

>> Andrea Falzarano: Welcome to the ASHA Leadership Academy webinar, Conflict Management. This webinar content is appropriate for entry and emerging leaders. I am Andrea Falzarano, Director of Association Governance Operations at the ASHA National Office. We planned today's webinar to help audiologists and speech-language pathologists in accepting conflict with employers, clients, or families as a reality and learning how to manage it rather than avoid it. Each of you should have a copy of the handout, which includes speaker information and slides. If you do not have the handout, please pause the webinar now and access a copy from our website. You will need a copy for interactive sections of this presentation. At this time, I would like to welcome our presenters, Kevin Nourse and Alice Waagen. Dr. Kevin Nourse is an executive coach, organization development consultant and facilitator with nearly 20 years of progressive experience in both for-profit and non-profit organizations. He is a professional certified coach through the International Coach Federation and has extensive experience coaching leaders in the areas of emotional intelligence, career planning and transition, influence, risk-taking, and strategic thinking. Dr. Alice Waagen is a business consultant who teaches management skills to business leaders. Alice has conducted hundreds of workshops and training classes at many of the country's top fortune 500 companies, non-profit organizations, and government agencies in the Washington, DC area. In just the last five years, more than 132 leaders from 26 regional organizations have graduated from her unique leadership development workshop series. Now let's begin. Over to you, Kevin.

>> Kevin Nourse: Thank you, Andrea. Well, we want to welcome everyone to the Leadership Academy webinar on conflict management. We're happy to have you participating in the webinar, where we will be talking today about tools and techniques and some strategies that you can use to surface, resolve, and prevent conflict. I would like to review our disclosure statements. I am Kevin Nourse, principal of Nourse Leadership Strategies, and I'm an independent contractor. I'm being financially compensated by ASHA for the Leadership Academy webinars, and I do not have any non-financial interests with ASHA. My colleague, Alice Waagen, is a subcontractor to Nourse Leadership Strategies. She is also an independent contractor, financially compensated by ASHA for the Leadership Academy webinars, and without any non-financial interests with ASHA, and we're going to get into the agenda in just a moment, but I do want to point out the two audiences for our webinar today. We've got those that are with us in the classroom we'll be engaged with, and then, of course, those of you listening to the recording, and at various intervals throughout the webinar, we're going to pose certain reflective questions as a way to deepen your learning, and so at those points, we'll invite you, um, the participants who are listening to the recording to hit

the pause button so that you can capture some thoughts or reflections on your handout or in your journal, and then when you're ready to resume, just hit the play button and rejoin us. So, with that, I'll toss to you, Alice, to go through the agenda.

>> Alice Waagen: Well, thanks, Kevin. I would also like to welcome everyone to our webinar today. Um, in our time together today, we're going to learn the fundamentals of managing conflict. Conflict is, um, something that makes most of us uncomfortable, and yet it is just part of being human beings. So, how are we going to do this? We're going to start by defining some key terms that we'll be using in our time together today. We're then going to take a look at the sources of conflict. Knowing where conflict might be coming from can give us the first clue on how to manage it going forward. We're then going to talk about the role our perception and others' perceptions play in conflict. And finally, we're going to give you a step by step process to use to respond to conflict when you find yourself in a tense situation. So, Kevin, I think you're going to go ahead and give us some definitions for our key concepts.

>> Kevin Nourse: That's right. So, let's start with the common frame of reference here in terms of the terms that we're going to be working with today. Well, we define conflict as, it's really an interpersonal situation where you've got individuals, this could be two or more, perceive that they have incompatibilities, and I think what's really critical there is the perception, and throughout the webinar, we're going to explore the role perception plays in terms of conflict and resolving it. Um, then we think about the broader concept of conflict management, and that really represents a number of things, such as skills or mindsets, or even processes for how we surface and resolve conflict in effective ways. Um, so, we know that skilled leaders, they not only resolve conflict, but again, the key is how can we prevent it, which I think is really key. Um, Alice, anything you want to reinforce on our definitions?

>> Alice Waagen: Sure. I think conflict is a very interesting, um, area to study, it's very interesting to mention of our interpersonal interactions at work, because the results can be so varied. Um, conflict, what we sometimes call healthy conflict, can really enhance relationships, because it allows people truly express deeply and passionately their beliefs, their values, etc., but at the same time, conflict can be devastating on relationships, if it is not handled well, if it's allowed to get out of control, or if people start to personalize it with each other. So, it's really a two-edged sword. It can be useful, it can be devastating. It depends how you approach it, which is why I think it is critical for us to take some time today and talk about it.

>> Kevin Nourse: Thanks, Alice, and just to underscore the idea of why it's so important for CSD professionals, there's a couple of reasons there, that building upon what you shared, Alice, I think more and more, we're finding that, um, what makes or breaks a leader, or a potential leader, is their ability to navigate tough times and the concept of conflict, and, so, um, you know, and I think we can all think about leaders that either handled it really well or not so well, so I think it really, um, is an important quality in terms of what it means to be, you know, in a leadership role, and especially, um, just the

nature of leadership these days, you know, about how to get support for your ideas, how to advance a vision. Inevitably, it's going to involve conflict, so it really becomes, I think a mark by which we judge if someone is leadership-like, is their capacity to navigate conflict. Okay, so, let's talk a little bit about, um, some of the emerging research on the topic of conflict, consistent with what we do in each of the webinars. Um, a number of studies listed there, but I thought one that really stood out for me was, um, conflict in the workplace and the importance and role of apology and forgiveness. So, it's an interesting component of, you know, just fundamental human relationships, how important it is to apologize and then forgive, so it's a two-way street, and yet, many times, we forget that, you know, in the workplace, those are really two important tools when it comes to, um, how we navigate conflict, so some fascinating, um, new themes coming out. We also think about, um, the one study, um, conflict in senior leadership teams and how that is linked to innovation. I think you start to look in leadership teams, the idea of, um, do I dare surface my true opinion, and, of course, all of that really is critical for innovation, which is, you know, how do we surface our ideas, even our scary ideas or ideas that seem stupid, but the ability to raise these ideas and explore them in terms of innovation for our organizations. So, those are a few of the themes that are emerging in terms of the research. So, at this point, um, I think, Alice, you're going to take the reflection question.

>> Alice Waagen: Yes, I am. Um, all right, excuse me, went a little too fast. Um, this is our first reflection question, and just to remind you all, those who are listening to the webinar recording, we're going to ask you to push pause and reflect along with us, but let me set the stage for the question first. How do skilled leaders successfully prevent or navigate conflict? So, sort of keep in mind, picture in your mind a leader you know that you feel is very adept at conflict. Either they know how to prevent it, or when it does erupt, they know how to manage it to where it has a successful finish and not a damaging one. So, those of you with the recording, press pause, and, you know, make some notes on this page, and those of you who are live with us in the classroom today, please put your thoughts in the chat box so that we can, um, see what your thoughts are on what do successful leaders do with conflict. Kevin, have you ever worked with somebody that was good at this? And can you share with us what you saw them do?

>> Kevin Nourse: Yeah. You know, it's interesting, I've got a client, I'm going to be doing a team coaching session on Monday with a CEO and his C-level executives, and I collected information in advance about perceptions, and, you know, I've had to coach this leader about how to show up, meaning people shared some pretty, um, deep perceptions and, um, observations about him and his role, and, so, the key, I think, um, when it comes to, especially my work with senior executives, is to show up powerfully, which is in essence to model behavior. So, I find that really effective leaders are the ones that can navigate conflict and kind of work through their issues, so they don't have these emotional reactions, but they really model the very behavior that they're hoping to elicit in others, and I think that's really critical to navigate differences of perception and reach, um, solutions. Yeah, how about you? What are you noticing?

>> Alice Waagen: Well, you know, I think it comes down to, um, the quality that we've spoken about in other webinars of emotional intelligence. I think skilled leaders are so good at recognizing emotions in others and putting them on the table and addressing them, um, and, so, you know, I could be in a room with six people and say something controversial, and two people don't care, two people, you know, laugh, two people, you know, intensely get upset, and what happens next is conflict. Well, if I don't see those different reactions and know how to manage that, it can get out of hand very, very quickly, so I think emotional intelligence is probably one of the most critical skills in dealing with conflict. Let me see what some of our folks in the classroom have said today. Anna mentions they address it as they come rather than letting it brew. You are so right. That is one thing that does not age well, not like wine, it makes it worse, the longer you wait. Kristy says successful leaders keep their own emotions separate and out of the interaction. Yeah, they're being dispassionate or being objective as opposed to getting pulled into it. Um, Anna says, again, active listening. Aruna, they identify possible conflict before they arise and address them and handle conflicts, yeah, I think, again, we're going to be talking about that today, the issue of being preventative on this is so much better than being reactive, and I think once you're attuned to those conditions, um, that can cause conflict, you're much better able to treat this, the issues before they arise. Mary Beth, successful leaders frequently check-in. Yeah, see how everyone's doing. Um, you know, acceptance, yes, I love it. Um, closure, yeah, I love it. I love everything you said there, Mary Beth, especially, let me pick up on the word closure, that's the other thing that I see is so damaging, when there is, um, an interaction, whether it's a meeting or, you know, a meeting in the hallway where there is some kind of a blow-up and maybe, you know, a leader or somebody will kind of step in and say, okay, let's smooth the water, but nobody ever goes back to close it out, nobody ever goes back to say what's going on here. I think that issue of closure is really important. If not, what appears to be a resolution is basically kind of a pause, and then the next trigger, and boom, it all comes back to the surface again. Wow, really good. Really good input, team. Thank you very much. Um, Kevin, I think you're going to take us now to our first area of thought, which is, um, this sources of conflict.

>> Kevin Nourse: That's right. So, um, kind of one of the assumptions we make in navigating this webinar is that the key to resolving and surfacing conflict is to depersonalize it, to get it out of the personal realm and give objectivity to it, and so with sources of conflict, we can, um, really step back and look at how we got into, you know, a conflict situation through three different lenses in terms of sources of conflict. So, let me introduce those. We start with personal, and we think about, um, those factors or sources that kind of live within you. So, for example, um, some people have, you know, coded in their brains that conflict is absolutely to be avoided, so their personal style is one of avoidance in terms of their natural style, um, and they have, you know, of course, their personality characteristics that really fall into that, but I think it's even interesting to think, um, you know, in my doctoral program, I looked at the psychodynamics of leadership and, um, you know, it's fascinating to think about, um, even our families of origin and how we grew up and how that shaped our attitudes towards conflict. Is it to

be avoided? Did we scream at each other? You know, so there's a whole lot of interesting things that happen from a more personal level that could contribute to, you know, sources of conflict. We then look over at interpersonal, so now we start to think about the dynamics, say, between, you know, you and me and how we, um, surface conflict and resolve it, or even how we trigger each other specifically. I recall, for example, um, an interaction with a colleague of mine that, um, we had very different interpersonal styles. For example, I tend to trust people unless proven otherwise, and my colleague tended to mistrust people unless they could be proven trustworthy. Well, you can immediately see, um, the source of conflict there. Um, I tend to be fairly open, my colleague was fairly closed, and so that was a fundamental, um, really a personal quality that showed up in our interpersonal dynamic.

Or another example, um, I know my style is to be more extroverted, meaning I like to think out loud, engage people, ask questions, dialogue, and those of you, our friends who are more introverted, you know, it's quite the opposite. In fact, putting people, introverts on the spot by asking them pointed questions can really shut them down, and I remember some very interesting conflict dynamics that could emerge from me as an extrovert of asking very pointed questions of introverts. They shut down, and the silence then causes me to function even more, so we started this very interesting little dance that can come up interpersonally. The third source of conflict, structural, it's, in essence, baked into the organization and how we function. So, you might find, for example, certain functions within organizations that are at odds with each other. Um, the creative side, for example, in marketing, interacting with the financial people, or the information technology people. Again, those are very, very different worlds, um, different sets of assumptions and values and what's really important, even goals. Um, or I've seen in some organizations, I recall working for a consulting company, and we had different regions of the organization, and many times, conflict would emerge between the regions for the same client, um, and so this conflict emerged from, basically, the way the organization was designed. So, often, the case, we find there's multiple, um, sources of conflict going on, and I think it's really helpful to, in essence, peel the onion in a conflict situation, try to get at what really is the source here. Um, let me pause here for a bit and just see, Alice, what you might add to this.

>> Alice Waagen: Well, it was interesting when you said how our backgrounds, um, even family of origin can affect our own personal, um, perception of conflict. It just reminded me so much that, um, I grew up in a home that our family culture was kind of low-key, you know, we just, you know, hung out and talked, or didn't, whatever, you know, I met, you know, the person who is now my husband, and his family was very different, they would sit at the dinner table, and they would, you know, argue and shout, and one time, I was just so appalled, and I said, why do you all fight with each other all the time? And everyone stopped dead in their feet and said, we're not fighting, we're just discussing.

(Laughing.)

>> Alice Waagen: What I saw as raging conflict was their mode of communication, and I think this is very interesting, when we take that into the workplace, because I see that dynamic oftentimes when I'm in work situations, where somebody feels that it's a culture of conflict and argument and fighting, where another person doesn't even see it that way, and that in itself can cause further conflict, because the person who is feeling negatively impacted by this is going to feel like they're not being treated fairly, where the person whose natural mode is to be confrontational doesn't see it as an issue at all. So, I think it's, I think one of the struggles in the workplace is we don't know what people are bringing in in terms of their own value system and their own method of communication until we work with them awhile and then see where those differences lie.

>> Kevin Nourse: That's a great example, Alice, in terms of, um, again, our upbringing, how that shows up at the table in terms of assumptions we make about what is good conflict or bad conflict. I would also add, or, um, go back to structural. I've also seen, um, other structural sources in terms of, um, two things. Excuse me, role ambiguity and role overload. So, for example, this leadership team I'm going to be working with on Monday, um, very fluid design of their specific roles, and there's two executives in particular who, um, are in conflict with each other, because the CEO's not done a very good job defining what their roles are, and, so, as you can imagine, the competition and the overlap and the this is my swim lane, you stay in your swim lane, can be substantial, as well as role overload, so the sense of just feeling I've got so much to do, I'm feeling absolutely overwhelmed, and how that can be, you know, such a source that could lead to kind of, you know, personal overwhelm, and then interpersonal conflict, just the way that our jobs are designed and maybe not having the resources for it. So, with that, I think, um, Alice, do you want to take us to our next reflection?

>> Alice Waagen: Absolutely. Um, thinking about this whole issue of conflict, um, what I'd like you all to do is reflect on a past conflict situation in your professional or even in your volunteer work. Um, what were the sources of the conflict that you were experiencing or that you were seeing? And so those of you on the recording, please press pause and rejoin us after you've done some thought about this. You know, we've given you these three kind of buckets, sources, how did that play out in your world? And then rejoin us when you're done with the reflection, and those of us, those of you who are in the classroom with us today, go ahead and put your thoughts in the chat box, and we will see what everyone comes up with. Um, you know, Kevin, I've got, actually, again, something you said triggered in my mind, um, a situation that I experienced a few years ago. I was called in, um, to help a call center team, um, actually, I was told to do a team-building, which is sometimes a euphemism for conflict resolution, and it was in this case. They were a call center team, and everyone was really, you know, at each other, and before I did anything, I went in and did some interviews and talked to them, and what I found was, um, they basically had a system they worked with where the incoming calls were categorized and put up there, and then they would select the call to deal with based on their level of expertise. That makes sense on the surface, but what it really came down to, their performance was measured on how many calls they could close out in a day, and so what happened over time is they would pick the calls, the easy ones,

the ones that could be resolved in a few seconds, leaving the harder ones to pile up, and at a certain point in the day, then they were forced into the harder calls, and there was all this finger-pointing about you're taking the easy ones and sticking me with the harder ones, so the system itself, the structure was literally breeding the conflict, and, you know, I said, well, I think you got to figure out a better way to measure performance than, you know, closing calls, because it's pitting them against each other as opposed to having them be collaborative. Have you seen anything like that, Kevin?

>> Kevin Nourse: Well, I have a very personal one that, um, I struggled with for a number of years, which was collaborating with a colleague to do some, um, some work together, and, um, it went back to we had very different kind of personalities, and interpersonally, again, I tended to be very trusting, she was very untrusting, that kind of thing, so a lot of differences, but what was, um, interesting about it was the whole structural way we interacted, and, so, primarily through e-mail, and, um, what ended up happening was it exacerbated those personal and interpersonal sources of conflict, because the channel, in essence, the structure we were using to address it and communicate does not lend itself to really good, um, communication and/or, you know, the ability to test assumptions and read body language, and, so, what it ended up doing was, because we chose the wrong, really, structure to navigate it, it deepened, you know, the interpersonal conflict and really damaged the relationship in terms of trust, and it just started to really spiral out of control. Really, really tough situation.

>> Alice Waagen: Wow. You know, I wish I had a dollar for every conflict situation in the workplace I dealt with that, at the root of it, started in an e-mail. I mean, you are so right, it is, it is definitely a great tool for very simple messages, but when you get into, um, actually dealing with tough issues, it makes them so much worse. I mean, I had an experience, I'm sure many of the folks listening to the webinar today, you know, have had this experience, where I had a manager and a subordinate in a very, very bad interpersonal situation that started with an e-mail war, and the irony is they were in offices next to each other. I mean, there was no reason whatsoever for it to have happened, other than just, you know, I have to say it, pure laziness of not getting up out of the chair and going around the corner and talking face-to-face. So, um, any other further comments from our folks on the line, or, excuse me, today with us in the classroom, please go ahead and put them in the chat box, if you've had any, um, experience like this, whether it was a conflict that you witnessed that was, you know, based on personal or interpersonal or structural, we'd love to hear your examples too. Well, with that, Kevin, I think you can start us off on our next adventure about perception in conflict.

>> Kevin Nourse: That sounds right. Great. So, let's talk then about, um, perception in conflict. So, again, our second lens, really looking at what is the source of conflict and how we make sense of it, again, from the perspective of if we understand what's going on below the covers, we can maybe find alternative ways to respond, more effective ways. So, Chris Argyris was a researcher and professor at Harvard. Years ago, he formulated this concept of what happens when people are making sense of the world, so

it's really a sense-making process. He called it the ladder of inference, the premise being we step up this ladder psychologically in an instant, and usually without even thinking about it. Um, so, the reality is that most conflict situations, the real differences are a matter of perception, that, objectively, perhaps we are not that far apart, but, again, something's blocking us, the way we perceive the situation or the motives of the other person. So, this model can really help us, um, decompress or decompose how we got into these conflict pickles in the first place, and, so, we start, really, at the bottom in this ladder, or these stair steps, first with the data that we notice in select. Never do we see all of the data. We are often very selective about it. For example, if I believe that you, Alice, my colleague, is, um, you're trustworthy and really reliable, then I tend to look for all of the data and the experiences that prop up that belief, but if I have this belief, um, deeply embedded that you're out to get me, um, then I start to see that approach too, and I see all of the data that props it up. So, that's the first level of the, um, the ladder here. We then start to add meaning to the data.

So, for example, you get an e-mail from your boss, it's written in all upper-case, so we immediately select the data, the upper-case letters, the fact that it's an e-mail, and we might add meaning to that, which is yelling, angry, really, you know, just ready to explode. We then step up to the level of assumption, so, um, gosh, maybe I didn't get my report on time, um, I did something wrong, associated with why would, you know, my boss send me this e-mail in upper-case. Then I start to draw conclusions. You know, perhaps I'm, you know, I'm not effective, I'm just, I'm terrible at this job, beliefs I adopt. Well, maybe I need to start looking for another job, because I'm clearly not cutting the, you know, cutting the criteria here. And then actions I take, maybe I start to look for a new job, or, um, avoid my boss, that kind of thing, and, so, that's a simple example, but it really brings to life each of those successive levels, and by the time we get to the very top, we're taking these actions absolutely, you know, confident in our thinking that I am fully justified in it. Now, the problem is that you're climbing your stair stepper ladder also, so my behavior triggers your behavior, and then your behavior triggers mine, and that's how we get into these interesting dynamics and conflict of conflict begets conflict, defensiveness begets defensiveness, and so on and so on. Alice, what would you highlight in this model?

>> Alice Waagen: Well, there's a couple points that I think are useful to think about. First of all, let me say that when Argyris put this model together, it's really how we successfully deal with the world. I mean, don't think of it as a negative thing. If we approached life by not selecting data, but basically absorbed everything in and tried to deal with it all as a unique entity, we'd never get anything done, so this way of processing things quickly, most of the time gives us success. The problem is, some of the time, the parts in the middle get a little bit out of sync, and that's where we get into trouble. The other point I'd like to make is if you look at this structure, the top and the bottom, the data we notice and the actions we take are the only things that are visible to everybody. The middle part is what I call the invisible part, and that's where it gets to be scary. So, if I'm sitting in a meeting with you, um, we are exposed to the same data, and we can see our actions and behaviors, but what we can't see is that inward internal

processing, and that's where it becomes very, very challenging, because I take that in as data, your actions, and I spin on it my own assumptions and conclusions and beliefs, and I act accordingly. You're seeing my actions, and you can see where I'm going with this, this kind of a loop happens, and it can be very, very deadly. So, how you deal with the invisible, how you express it and get it out there is the key to making something like this work.

>> Kevin Nourse: That's great, Alice. Thank you, and even, you know, when you reflect on the roles of, the role that a mediator plays, oftentimes, mediators will sit down with the parties in conflict and, um, you know, really, um, unpack this, if you think about unpacking it, and often, it goes back to what data did we both see that triggered us, what did we experience, and then start to think about assumptions that we might have made, and so that's really the key, if you think about it. So, oftentimes, you know, you're trying to resolve conflict with someone, what exactly did I see or experience that suggested the very thing I'm concluding about them, and to take it back to that level, and I think that's really critical, that point of assumptions, I think, is really, probably the most diesel place to intervene, combined with looking at what exactly did we see or experience that suggested that this was an issue. Would you, um, agree with that, Alice, or do you have another perspective of this as a tool to unpack conflict?

>> Alice Waagen: Oh, I think you're right on target. In fact, the phrase I've heard so many people use, and I use it myself, is as you climb the ladder, you need to test your assumptions before you take action. So, if you can visualize, when you get to assumptions, a little side arrow out to the side that says test it, so, you know, in your example, um, you know, I get an e-mail from my boss, you know, it's all in caps, um, my assumption is that my boss is angry. Now, before I do my conclusions, beliefs and actions, I need to stop and test that, maybe make a phone call and say, you know, do we need to talk here, because your e-mail sounded angry, and the boss might say, why? Oh, shoot, I hit the cap key, didn't mean to, or the boss might say, you bet I'm angry, we need to talk about this. So, it's taking that side step off the ladder and testing is the key to really making sure that you've got your data straight before you go ahead and take action off of it. Have you done that, Kevin, with the testing assumptions?

>> Kevin Nourse: Yeah, that's right. That's exactly it, and challenging when I coach people, to understand, you know, you saw something, but what else might explain that? In other words, that's the challenge I have for some of my clients, which is you're enraged right now, you saw this, your boss do this one thing, what else might explain their behavior? What do you think you would say to them? How might you test it out? Because I think, a lot of times, um, you know, this is a really good skill, even, not only in your own conflict, but many of you that are on the leadership trajectory, you're often in a position to have to mediate conflict. I think that's, by default, often what it means to be in a manager or leader kind of role, so I think this, to me, is a really good schema to use when you've got two battling people on your team, how do you navigate that situation, and maybe it's going back to what they saw and assumptions they made and other potential reasons for that, because, you know, I find that more often than not, um, you

know, when it comes down to it, um, my intent is not the same as my impact, and, um, you know my impact, but you don't know my intent, and you'll probably fill in the loop in terms of assumptions you're going to make with limited data, and I think that really gets critical with people we don't know. Um, we create a story to explain their behavior, and many times, depending on the situation, that story may not be very savory, for lack of a better word. So, um, I think we're about to go into another reflection question.

>> Alice Waagen: Um, yes. Let me set ourselves up here. Um, all right, let me reverse a bit here. The, um, question, Kevin, why don't you go ahead and advance that slide? The question is simply this: Reflect on a recent conflict situation you've experienced, and what are some of the inaccurate assumptions you or your conflict partner may be making about each other? So, we're going to ask you to kind of get a little personal with this. You know, what is a conflict situation that you are experiencing? And walk the ladder, go down to those middle rungs, and try to figure out what are some assumptions you may be making, and maybe even jump into the mind of your partner and figure out what might be some assumptions they may be making about you, and list them out, because then the next step would be to test them. So, again, those of you on the recording, if you'd like to push pause and spend some time reflecting on this, I think it's a very useful reflection to be thinking of when we're talking about conflict, and those of you on the, um, in the classroom with us today, please go ahead and share with us some assumptions that you might be experiencing in a conflict situation. So, Kevin, anything come to mind, um, in your experience on this?

>> Kevin Nourse: Yeah. I'm coaching a leader now in a healthcare organization who's really struggling. This individual has, um, actually about four different bosses, which is just, you know, you can imagine the perfect storm in terms of conflict, um, but he's, he grew up in an environment where he had, you know, um, as a leader, he grew up in an environment where he had adequate resources and, you know, the right staff to be able to fulfill his function, and, um, so, he's making, you know, these assumptions that may or may not be grounded, but that his, um, his bosses collectively are not supporting him, and that they almost want him to fail, and it's interesting, because I've talked with, um, some of his bosses, and, you know, basically, from their perspective, which is, look, this is the way it is, we're really cutting down, as a lot of healthcare organizations are, we're really cutting expenses, and we've got to do more with less, and, so, it has nothing to do with the person, it's just that's life here. Um, you know, so they're starting to create these, um, assumptions about my client, this manager, in terms of, um, he's not a team player, he's not working, optimizing what he's got, that kind of thing, so it's setting up a really challenging situation for him, and again, we're having to really look at, you know, what's the evidence, what might be other explanations for not getting the resources you need. Yeah, how about you? Anything you've noticed with clients?

>> Alice Waagen: Oh, yeah. You know, I had a situation a number of years ago, a coaching situation where, you know, a boss had a really difficult time with a subordinate. Um, she was seeing a subordinate, sort of checking out, not participating, not wanting to be, you know, active in meetings, and, so, she made just a bucket-load of assumptions

around this person doesn't like me as a boss, this person's disengaged because they don't like the work, and was really ready to have her own, you know, coaching session based on these assumptions, and I said, whoa, let's kind of slow down, what's the behavior you're seeing, and what are the assumptions you're making. You know, I pulled out, literally, one of these ladders and said, let's write this all down, and before you do any of your actions, you need to test these assumptions out, and, sure enough, it was a situation where the person was just in a very bad place in her home life that was truly affecting her attitudes, um, towards life in general and work, and once they kind of put it out there, found that if she had taken those initial actions, it would have been deadly. All right, so, let's see what our team has, um, shared with us. Um, Kristy says I believe an assumption made was being direct because of being busy and being unfriendly. Yeah, again, you know, making those assumptions, if I'm in a hurry and I'm just going to be kind of direct, you know, it doesn't mean I'm rude and unfriendly, it means I'm in a hurry, and making sure people know that. Aruna said conflict partner assumed I was a slacker, that I didn't follow rules, didn't respect authority. My perception of the person was that they were inflexible. Boy, that is, like, a perfect recipe for conflict, is, again, you're not being a slacker, you're just being overworked. Total, total different things. Mary Beth, lack of trust between myself and a classroom teacher. Rather than asking me a question, she jumps over me to, um, e-mail an expert internal coach. Oh, wow, if she just asked me the question, I could have answered. Oh, wow. Doesn't feel my knowledge is valuable yet. Well, you know, Mary Beth, I'll challenge you back; that's a good assumption on your part, but I would test that. You know, maybe, if you can, in a quiet, calm moment, um, you know, validate, you know, sit down and say, you know, I see you're going around me, you know, do you think I just don't have the experience yet, and see if you could engage in that. I think it would be great.

Um, Anna says inaccurate assumptions, lack of information about the situation, low self-esteem about personal capabilities, seen through a very narrow, negative lens. Yeah, that's the bottom rung, a narrow lens means they're just not taking in enough data, and they're jumping up that ladder to conclusions and actions based on insufficient data. Really good observation. Um, Mary Beth says I just said to wait and give her time since she was coming to me with a question more than two weeks ago. Yeah, good. Good. You know, I hope, um, folks listening to the recording, you know, see how when you really kind of analyze a situation, a conflict situation, very objectively with this ladder, you really can see that there's many actions you can take, some might be helpful and some might not be helpful, depending on how you're really unpacking those assumptions and testing them in the middle. Yeah. Okay, Kevin, I think you're going to, next, take us through, um, the, how to deal with this, how to respond to conflict.

>> Kevin Nourse: That's right. So, in this segment, what we're going to talk about is a process, and then some of the specific behaviors that you can use in responding to conflict. So, let me just start, um, with, you know, just an overview of the process specifically. So, we think about in, um, phase one, you know, we're approaching conflict, we know we're in it, and usually, the first thing is we have kind of that, can have that sense of panic or anger or rage or whatever it might be. That's often not the best time to

try to engage someone, when we are, um, heightened, we're triggered, and, so, the idea is how can we, in phase one, neutralize some of the emotions that may block us from our, you know, good ole problem-solving, cognitive brain. Um, we then think about, um, move into the phase of resolving the conflict, engaging with our conflict partner, finding ways to, um, both understand what's going on, um, explore the issue, problem-solve, maybe do some negotiations, some back and forth. Um, and then, you know, a lot of people kind of end it there, but we argue that, really, there's a third phase, which is how to deepen your learning and kind of your relationship with the, um, conflict partner to prevent future conflict, because I think that really is, I think a key part of it, which is we're, in a sense, we're leaving value on the table, if we don't have a chance to reflect on how did we do this, how did we get into it, and what would we do differently next time. Okay, so with that, let's take a little bit more of a deeper view. So, as I mentioned, in phase one, we talk about neutralizing the emotions. We're in the grip, as I say, in the grip of our emotions. Um, so, we can think about it in terms of activities, such as gaining objectivity.

So, for example, um, debriefing or thinking about the experience offline, about what might be some of the sources of conflict, personal, interpersonal, structural, whatever, so we're trying to get perspective on this. We're also, maybe we break out the ladder of inference, and we think about what we saw or experienced and some of the assumptions that we made or the other might have made about us and, so from that, to me, that's a really great place to ground us, so we can feel more grounded then when we engage with our partner and start to find ways to empathize and to build trust and openness. It's almost like setting the ground rules for interaction. Let me make sure I demonstrate, you know, active listening and empathy, to really go stand on their island and try to bring down the emotional temperature. So, neutralizing emotions is at two levels for us, individually, and then in the pair with our conflict partner. Um, from that, we can then go into resolve the conflict, so now we can start thinking about, um, identifying solutions based on kind of what does this other person need, what do I need, so it's about surfacing our needs and finding ways to meet each other's needs. Um, negotiating offers, we can think about, you know, if you'll do X, I'll do Y, so there's an exchange of value going on, so you can see this kind of bleeds into a negotiation. Um, we then can move into the final phase, so we've resolved it, we've come to an agreement about how we're going to move forward, I think revisiting, um, and reviewing lessons learned from the situation is really, really helpful. In essence, we got into this, resolved it, but if we did it all over again, how could we have prevented this? And then perhaps it implies we create some ground rules to guide our future interactions. So, if, in the future, um, you're really overwhelmed and can't get to my task, you're going to give me some type of a signal, or you're going to let me know within, you know, 24 hours kind of thing. So, Alice, um, in your experience, what do you want to reinforce here with our process?

>> Alice Waagen: Well, let me start with, um, neutralizing the emotions. I think it is so important to be aware of the physical manifestation that conflict and stress can have upon us to give you kind of the early warning. So, in other words, some people, when

they are approaching conflict or they perceive that conflict is coming at them, maybe somebody has said something, whatever, you know, their breathing may hurry up, they may start to perspire, their face might get red, you know, so when you're in conflict, if you can, kind of disengage enough to say what are my physical manifestations here, then you know in the future, when you start to feel your heartbeat raise, or you start to feel flushed, it's like, uh-oh, I think I'm starting to lose it, you can then step back earlier, before things are said that could be hurtful or harmful. So, kind of know your emotional reaction to change, to stress and to conflict, I think can be very, very useful. Um, I always say that, you know, if you feel that you can't control the situation, definitely, you know, put a stop to it, suggest a break, suggest to come back later, because we know, research in neuroscience tells us that there's a tipping point for people when they get too stressed or too angry, that it disengages the logical processing part of the brain and really kind of triggers a more primitive fight or flight situation. So, you know, flight is, you know, you just shut down, you stop listening, you know, you back out of the room, whatever. Fight is even worse though, it triggers you to antagonize and to be aggressive. So, you don't want to get to that situation. If you feel that you're getting close to that, definitely, you know, put up the stop sign and say, look, this is not working for me, I just need some time to think about this situation and come back to you with some other, um, you know, feedback or another way to deal with it. You know, in the resolving of the conflict, I think one of, you know, my biggest advice down there is do not be afraid to bring in an objective third-party. You know, some people have this belief, well, if we two can't work it out ourselves, there's something wrong with us, or we're failing. No. Sometimes, you do need a third-party in there, again, to kind of manage the conversation, to kind of slow it down and to get people to really be listening to each other rather than just, you know, talking back and forth.

And lastly, on the prevent, I also think it's really good to do some reflection over time, you know, you can do it by thinking back, or you can do it in the moment, what are your hot-button triggers, what are the things that really get under your skin, and, you know, is it a situation and/or is it a person, and again, to go into that more proactive mood, mode rather. Um, I know myself, I tend to get really, um, annoyed, um, when I feel that somebody's doing something that I perceive as being disrespectful, um, and, honestly, sometimes, it isn't disrespectful, it just hits me that way. You know, for instance, um, I have found over time that, you know, when clients cancel appointments with me at the last minute, it really drives me crazy, and I used to wonder why, and then, finally looking at it, I was like, well, they're not respecting my time, they're acting as if my time doesn't count for anything, so the fact that they're canceling, you know, a two-hour meeting the night before is disrespectful. I tried to realize, again, that's an assumption on my part, that is gluing together the impact on me and assuming that that's their intent, and it probably isn't. So, know your triggers, and then do some thought about, you know, am I making some assumptions that that isn't really that person's intent going into it. So, um, that's sort of my thoughts on all three of these, Kevin.

>> Kevin Nourse: That's great. You know, the other thing I was, um, your story shared triggered for me was, again, I think this idea of gaining objectivity. Other strategies I've

seen used very effectively, which if maybe you're in conflict with another partner, are there other people that know your conflict partner and can help, um, unpack that so that it's, if you have perspective that what they're doing is not personal to me, but this is often how they show up in conflict situations, um, can be really, um, I think a helpful perspective. The other way is also to ask people for feedback, again, trusted colleagues who know you and can look at the situation and give you an outsider's view about what's happening, including not only what your partner, your conflict partner is doing, but what are you doing that may be triggering them. So, I think it's, you know, it takes a level of humility to kind of reveal that to others, because the fact is that, often, when we're in conflict, it's a very vulnerable place for us, really stressful, but, again, I think anything we can do to kind of bring down the temperature, get perspective, it often opens up new solutions that we didn't know existed, and I think that's really helpful then when we actually engage with the other, we're in much more control of ourselves, and, again, we know with all of the research on emotional intelligence how vitally critical that is. So, at this point, I think maybe a final reflection question would be great. Alice, do you want to take us into that?

>> Alice Waagen: I would be happy to. What we're going to ask you to do here is think back on some of the ideas we've shared with you in the webinar today, and have they surfaced for you some strategies you could use to navigate a current conflict situation? Or maybe it's not current, but you're anticipating it might come up. What were some strategies you'd like to make sure you remember to use after today? Those of you who are listening to the recording, please hit pause and give this question some really good thought and make some good solid notes. What's your take-away from today that you can use as a strategy going forward? And those of you who are with us today in the classroom, please share your ideas, um, you know, with us in the chatroom, and perhaps a strategy you're thinking of might be one that, um, that might trigger one in another person. Kevin, have you seen any good strategies in your practice on, um, conflict, handling conflict?

>> Kevin Nourse: Yeah. I think it gets back to that prevention perspective. Um, for example, um, in teams, conflict in teams, that, you know, sometimes, you can really head it off at the pass by, again, formulating some ground rules around, for example, particularly around decision-making, because that's the source of angst in so many teams, which is how are we going to make decisions. Is it consensus? Is it voting? And sometimes, when you identify a process for how we're going to do something upfront, it goes a long way toward mitigating the need to be such a great conflict-resolving or conflict-manager on the other side, and, so, I'm all about if you don't have to be an expert on conflict management, be better at building alignments upfront, because it's a whole lot easier to do it there than it is on the other side, when you're soaking in your stress emotions, as it were.

>> Alice Waagen: It's a great point. You know, I was coaching a number of years ago, um, a manager who was having real difficulty with his boss, um, and, you know, really needed some guidance, and so I asked him, you know, what was going on, what was

causing him to be so angry and upset, and, you know, he went into a lot of detail that I'll just summarize here for the discussion, that, basically, he was a very fast thinker, moved fast, thought fast, and really wasn't very detail-oriented, and she was exactly the opposite, and, so, whenever he would come in to meet with her and he'd want to give a three-second status, everything's going well, life is good, move on, she would be stopping him and drilling down and drilling down, and it drove him crazy, and, you know, I said, basically, you guys can continue to struggle, or you got to work out how to meet in the middle, and so I said, the next time you meet with her, take a pad in with you to make notes, but write at the top of the pad in a big black magic marker, slow down. I said you can even show it to her, if you want to, but you have to slow your pace down and begin to meet her in the middle on this, or you're just going to continue to fight and not get anywhere. So, I mean, it was a very simple strategy, but it gave him, like, that visual clue that he had to modify his communication style, or this simply wasn't going to work out. Um, let me see what folks have shared with us. Um, Aruna says used a third-party to mediate a discussion. Going forward, I plan to reflect on the ladder of inference. Good, and think about the other person's assumptions. Yeah, you know, it's interesting, if you kind of try to get in that person's head and walk the ladder back from their actions to what might they have been assuming that would make those actions make sense, that's great fodder for conversation. Um, Mary Beth, open up about my assumptions with fellow team members, practice active listening, and come to the table with proactive ideas. That's excellent. Really, really good strategies. Anna says ensure that timing of the conflict discussion is appropriate. Yeah, yeah.

Self-reflection about how conflict was handled and how the kind of conflict would be handled better if it occurred to you. You know, timing is a huge issue. You know, it just drives me nuts when people will put a divisive thing on the table three minutes before the end of the meeting, and you don't have time, and so people rush through it, you know, so put the divisive things upfront when you've got some time. Absolutely a great idea. Yeah, again, adequate time for everybody to share fully without interruption. You know, that just gets down to my old word of respect. You know, when you open a discussion where people feel they don't have the time, that can result in anger, because it can be perceived, and possibly rightly so, as just disrespectful. If I'm not giving somebody the time to really get involved and to share their views, that's really not a good thing at all. Kevin, do you see anything in our, um, folks' responses here, does it trigger anything else for you on this subject of conflict?

>> Kevin Nourse: Oh, yes. As the world's biggest, um, conflict-avoider here, I think about, even just in terms of interpersonal relationships, I find that, you know, I make a point to reach out to friends and initiate, and I really like it when they do that for me, and what I've discovered, um, in terms of my own personality is that I make these assumptions all the time, and, you know, other people are assuming that if I want to get together, then I'll let them know, and I'm making the assumption many times of, well, why don't they pick up the phone and call? So, it's such a fascinating thing to revisit these concepts in terms of it cuts across professional, but to our, you know, personal lives too, and I think in many cases, that's the biggest test of our skills as a

conflict-resolver, is can we take this into our interpersonal lives and, you know, families and spouses and all that is a real challenge. So, yeah, some really good, um, ideas that folks have shared.

>> Alice Waagen: Yeah. Great, great strategies. Well, wonderful. Let's go ahead and kind of wrap-up our ideas for today. You know, the first bullet, conflict is natural and normal, and it's important, it has an important role, if it is managed well and not let to get out of control. Um, understand sources and how assumptions can really get in the way. And then, you know, think about the three-step process, and use it as a way to navigate through, to get the value out of conflict without it being damaging. So, what do we like you to do after today? Practice. Practice. Active listening, using open-ended questions to really probe and get into what's going on in conflict situations. Um, try out using this three-step process, to plan how you can resolve a current conflict situation, and as we always like to advocate, is interview another, a leader who you think is very good at this, to see if they can help you understand better ways to deal with conflict. Well, with that, I'd like to turn the mic back over to Andrea.

>> Andrea Falzarano: Thank you, Kevin and Alice, and thank you, everyone, for joining us. This webinar is part of a series in ASHA's Leadership Academy. For more information, including information on continuing education credits, visit www.ASHA.org and search Leadership Academy. We also encourage you to join the ASHA Community, focused on leadership topics. Go to ASHA.org and search Leadership Academy. You will find a link to the online community on this page. This concludes the ASHA Leadership Academy webinar on Conflict Management. Good-bye from the ASHA National Office.

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