



Hotel Leaders: Don't Let Conflict Derail the Creative Process

Key Preparations Include Recognizing 'Red Buttons'

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Conflict has such a negative connotation that I prefer to call it the “creative process.” Constructive debate and discussion are at the root of all truly impactful change. The hard part is keeping those discussions on track, motivational and away from destructive confrontation.

In today’s landscape of fewer resources, increasing demands, a less experienced workforce and a heightened sensitivity to the individual, how do you move the creative process forward and not get bogged down in negativity?



Here are a few ways in which you, as a leader, can stop discussion from turning into conflict:

1. Know Yourself



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What are your red buttons? What is your frame of mind going into the discussion? What are your personal feelings on the topic? Can you not talk when you should not? What are your escape phrases? Facilitating the creative process starts with you being available to your team and modeling the behavior required to achieve the best outcomes.

2. Know Your Audience

Who will be in the room? Who agrees, who disagrees and to what degrees? Do they have a vested interest? Who will you use at what point in the conversation to balance an opinion? Who are the landmines? What alliances have been formed? This aspect of preparedness allows for tactical changes as the conversations progress.

3. Do Your Pre-Work

Framing up the main issues with the key opinion leaders prior to the actual discussion is a must. Where do they stand, where are they flexible and what is non-negotiable for them? Part of knowing your audience is getting to the stakeholders prior to a debate and incorporating their viewpoints into your agenda. This will help avoid any surprises which could otherwise end up being points of contention.

4. Identify Disagreement Before It Happens or as It Is Happening

Use your senses — two ears, two eyes, one mouth — in proportion. Observing, listening and thinking through what is really being said before you talk will help you pick up on useful clues, verbal and non-verbal. It will also allow you to sense the escalation of the dialogue and turn it around. Remember, they are watching you just as you are watching them. Use this time to demonstrate how you want them to model the discussion process.

5. Gain Consensus on the Next Steps

Always close with actions and agreement. If managed correctly, a level of agreement will have been reached through a majority, not through mandate. It is not a matter of who won or lost, but of whether the business is moving forward and everyone is on board with the direction. Whether everyone fully agreed or not, the go-forward steps need to be endorsed by all.

6. Follow up Post-Meeting

Depending on the level of discussion and the importance of the topic, having one-on-one sessions with the attendees afterward will allow for a timely temperature check. It will give you a greater insight into how all the individual team members think, which will in turn allow you to adapt your approaches to accommodate their personalities. Even more importantly, it will allow them to share additional input/opinions that they may not have shared in the group setting.

In closing, there is an old saying that I couldn't disagree with more: "No pain no gain." This process should always be constructive and professional, deliver meaningful outcomes and provide for team growth.

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