

## **Handling Church Conflict Ministers/Spouse Retreat March 8, 2016**

The minister was leaning on the doorframe of his office, pain and anger written large across his face. “It just kills me when people are this ugly in any community, especially the church. What happened in the church meeting last night was bald-faced character assassination. Nobody stopped it until I finally stepped in. Even then, they just sat there. Today Joan is still at it, spreading her poisonous lies about Shelia all over the congregation. What hurts so is how the people of this congregation play dead and let her keep on. I can’t believe it. At times like this, it makes me sick to be the pastor of this church.”

**PPT** Conflict: a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one.

- It could be defined as a prolonged armed struggle: *overseas conflicts*.
- It could also be defined as an incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests: *there was a **conflict between** his business and domestic life.*]

**PPT** Health is not the absence of conflict. A healthy church has learned a way of thinking and seeing and behaving that's redemptive, so that when the inevitable conflict comes, they're able to handle it. They've learned that God is sovereign over all things, so that conflict is not necessarily a threat.]

**PPT CHRISTIANS FIGHT!]** Conflicts erupt between a minister and an enclave of church officers, between “the first family” of the congregation and a pastor, between the associate pastor and the head of staff. Rival congregational factions feud over church board nominations or lock horns over what color the carpet should be or if we should allow our young people to go to such and such a place for an outing. A group of church officers organizes a campaign against national church staff because of a denominational position on abortion or on homosexuality.

**PPT** Christians not only fight, they also often fight dirty.] Issues are personalized. Gossip and hearsay fog up reason and common sense. Roberts’ Rules are misused to polarize members of governing bodies, making political alliances more influential than reason or spirituality in determining leaders’ votes.

It is no wonder that so many thoughtful Christians avoid church conflict like the plagues of Egypt. **PPT** The question is not whether Christians fight or even whether Christians fight dirty. The question is whether church conflict can ever be Christian.]

Conflict in the church is unavoidable. It’s been that way from the beginning. The church began with a remarkable blend of close community and simmering conflict.

The Book of Acts describes a peaceful atmosphere: *“All the believers were together and had everything in common...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44-47).*

Only a couple of pages later, however, the situation has changed. Not only is the church threatened by outside enemies, but the extraordinary unity within was apparently short-lived.

Complaints arose about the way the church was caring for widows. Later, the church was divided over lifestyle expectations for new converts. Still later, Paul and Barnabas sharply disagreed over a staffing decision, and they parted ways.

Procedures, prerequisites, personnel – all areas that continue to challenge church unity today.

Pastors may feel the effect of conflict in the church more than most. One reason is that relationships are the professional priority of pastors. They know their effectiveness in the church is often judged by how well people work together. A second reason is that pastors tend to be “people persons,” relationally oriented. Getting along with people is important to them. And when relationships are strained, pastors often feel like failures.

**PPT** Politicians are satisfied with 51% of the constituency behind them. Pastors, however, feel the pain when even one critic in a hundred raises his voice.]

**PPT** Conflict is actually an opportunity. First Corinthians is a long conflict resolution letter. At the end of chapter 10, Paul sums up by saying, *“... whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God, not for your own good but for others. Follow my example.”*

**PPT** Paul says to look at conflict as God looks at it. In every conflict, he has given you an opportunity to exalt him.] He wants you to behave so differently that people take notice and are impressed. It's an opportunity to grow in Christ-likeness. If we embrace conflict as a primary means of sanctification—it's not something we go looking for, but when it comes—we slow down and say, “Lord, if nothing else in this situation, refine me.”

### **PPT Coping With Criticism**

**PPT** Jonathan Edwards once wrote: “Resolved: that all men should live for the glory of God. Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will.”

That resolve is rarely put to a greater test than when we are on the receiving end of pointed criticism.

Sometimes the criticism is subtle: “I think you’d benefit from listening to this tape of one of my favorite radio/TV preachers. He really gives you the meat of the Word.”

Other times the criticism is sharp: “In your sermons, I don’t appreciate the way you use (pick one), humor, Scripture, contemporary analogies, or personal illustrations.”

Still other times, it’s scathing: “Ever since you’ve come here you’ve been prostituting the gospel.”

How we respond to such attacks reveals a lot about our calling and our composure.

**PPT** As someone once pointed out, the qualifications of a pastor are these: the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros.

Here are some things that can help you to cope when criticized:

### **PPT** *Live For Christ, Not Ministry*

To many their ministry is their life. Their time and energy are given to the church.

As soon as one sermon has been given, a new one is already on the drawing board with, at most, a six-day deadline. There are always people who need to be visited and counseled. There are always additional programs to be started and staff to be trained.

Besides all this there is the weekly “emergency” of one sort or another that demands your complete attention.

When is enough enough?

Yet **PPT** the busier you become with church ministry (most of which is good), the less consistent you become in spiritual disciplines.] Many find that ministry is their life, but something isn’t quite right. The joy of the Lord, the joy of true spiritual service, seems to be disappearing.

In Philippians chapter 3 Paul challenges our priorities. His desire was to know Christ. The thought occurs to me, for **PPT** what shall it profit a minister if he oversees home Bible studies, club programs, church services, youth ministries, ten committees, and preaches, if he loses his own soul, or at least his affection for and close walk with his Savior?]

What I am trying to say is, **PPT** Christ, not ministry must be my life if I am going to be able to cope with conflict when it comes. **PPT** If my spiritual priorities are in order then I will be able to handle conflict when it comes.

### **PPT** *Maintain A Healthy View Of Carnality*

I don't have time to explore all we believe or don't believe about sanctification. I do believe as we teach concerning the crucifixion of the old man. But let me say, **PPT** a lot of church problems are caused by carnal minded people. **PPT** According to Paul's letter to the Galatians, anytime hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy are being manifested, carnality is being manifested.

For sure, people that have never been sanctified will at times manifest these qualities. You would expect that.

But, **PPT** I have seen people, even ministers who would testify to being saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit manifest at times a spirit of carnality.] If you don't believe that then ask Bishop Greg or better yet go to a quadrennial or general conference.

**PPT** Just as sure as there is a crucifixion there is a resurrection. At times people choose, not because they have to but because they want to, they choose to resurrect the old carnal nature.]

It reminds us that we must continue to preach and teach the crucifixion of the old carnal nature and that people do not have to resurrect that old nature but can through the help of the Holy Spirit let it remain crucified.

### **PPT** *Regular, Systematic Evaluations*

**PPT Proverbs 12:15** states, "*The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.*" ] **PPT** While some criticism might be off the mark, some criticism may be very much on target. In order for that constructive criticism to reach our ears, we need to ask for systematic evaluations of our ministry.]

You could get your administrative council to evaluate you. **PPT** Learn to listen to the things you are hearing and evaluate yourself.

**PPT** Always be open to people's criticism. It's better to listen to complaints now than have them criticize you among their friends.]

### **PPT** *Allow For Different Tastes*

**PPT** Many of those times, when conflict seems at its worst, it's simply a matter of taste: some members of the family like things one-way and some another.] But like families, they can find themselves squabbling fiercely.

**PPT** Like many pastors, at first we want to please all the people all the time, and we take comments about people's preferences too seriously. But we must realize that in many instances, people's criticisms are nothing more than matters of taste.

Providing an inclusive and diverse program is important. On the other hand, realizing that people have different tastes will help us weather criticism.

## **PPT The Way People Fight**

I want to give you a description of the approaches people use to fight in church.

Let me begin by saying, **PPT** conflict comes in many colors.

We normally know it as red, fiery hot: shouting matches, withdrawn pledges, fired pastors, split churches. This type of conflict burns everyone it touches.

But conflict also comes in blue, as cool and calm as a placid mountain lake. Issues are moved, seconded, debated calmly, and voted upon. People walk out of meetings “losers” but not bitter or angry.

Other conflict is green contributing to the growth of a congregation. Some is black, foreboding doom for the church. Some is an amorphous gray, uncertain and undecided but enveloping the church like fog.

So when we talk about church conflict, we’re talking about many things. And when we talk about dealing with conflict, we need to recognize the specific color or approach of conflict we’re dealing with.

### **PPT 1. Battlefield**

**PPT a. behavior** – They have a tendency to fight, embarrass and demean. Their total approach is to overrun individuals, and put them down. They will do anything they can to embarrass or demean the other individual.]

Not only to they try to weaken their opponents they try to destroy their opponents.

They withhold information and only use it when they want to attack.

#### **PPT b. resolution** –

**PPT (a)** Separate the factions, get them apart.] They are like bannier roosters, you get them together then they start squabbling and fighting and picking each other.

**PPT (b)** Get the participants to set the ground rules.] Where in the building are we going to meet; What day of the week are we going to meet; What time are we going to meet; How many people will be there, etc.

**PPT (c)** Let them get their anger and fears out in the open.] If you suppress those angers and fears then somewhere else those are going to come out. Maybe they will come out in a hidden agenda meeting.

**PPT (d)** Use a mediator that both sides can accept.

## **PPT 2. Competitive**

**PPT a. behavior** – They want to win at all cost. They will use whatever means to win.] They use an equalizer. Example: a boy who is smaller than normal and gets into a lot of fights but he always wins, why? He uses an equalizer, a bat or lead pipe or anything he can find to equalize the situation. They will do anything to win. They may demean or criticize.

**PPT** They have to prove their point is right. Because it is their tendency to be right, they may get very aggressive. They share only information that is favorable to them.]

### **PPT b. resolution** –

**PPT** (a) Get the separate sides to set priorities, what is most important to them?

**PPT** (b) Develop a common ground with common values.

**PPT** (c) Confront the problems not the people.] Dick is never the problem – it's what Dick does do or doesn't do that's the problem.

**PPT** (d) Develop options. Focus on what you have that is alike and that's what we are going to put our emphasis on and develop our options.]

## **PPT 3. Dialogue Position**

**PPT a. behavior** – They want a problem solved. Their focus is on problem solving.] They solve problems and come to a mutual agreement.

**PPT** They share information widely. They want to make sure we have as much information accumulated as possible.] Notice: their discussion may get very intense and heated but it is usually very specific, it doesn't generalize. They talk about the specific problem itself.

**PPT** They are loyal to the group or church as a whole. It is more important to them to see that the church comes out of this healthy than that I win.]

Because this level of conflict is handled so smoothly, some people don't see it as "conflict." But whenever people of different views try to work out an agreement, no matter how graciously they do so, you've got conflict.

When conflicts remain at this level, a great deal can be accomplished: problems get solved, people understand each other better, relationships improve, and trust is deepened.

### **PPT b. resolution** –

**PPT** (a) Define the issues. Get to the heart of it.

**PPT** (b) Determine responsibility and make assignments.

**PPT** (c) Collect all necessary information then come back together.

### **PPT How To Deal With A Disgruntled Board Member**

One of the greatest areas that a younger minister or any minister faces is how to get along with disgruntled board members. Many young pastors have left their first board meeting questioning why do people act this way? Even seasoned pastors who were blessed by having wonderful boards but yet felt led to follow God's leading to another church, question and struggle with a very controlling and disgruntled board. Some pastors have even questioned whether they are Christians by the negative and obstinate way they act.

Most board members are great! However, many pastors come to a new church and "inherit" a group of people who like to govern every step and operation of the church. Traditions are hard to break and overcome. They are not formed overnight and cannot be quickly changed. **PPT** In some cases, these members have served as board members for 20-40 years, having a mindset, "I was here before you came and I will be here after you leave!"

**PPT** How do situations like this get so out of control? **PPT** Most board members have been voted in by popular vote of the membership and some have remained on the board for extended periods of time and perhaps beyond their usefulness. **PPT** Some churches are at a disadvantage due to not having enough members to adequately choose from, others assume that business behind closed doors are going well.

We understand the need for church boards and the scripture that validates their role but some boards are not fulfilling the scriptures, they are only maintaining control over the business side of things. Many are ill equipped for spiritual matters.

### **DEALING WITH DISGRUNTED BOARD MEMBERS**

**PPT Understand the History.** It is really important for any pastor to know, if possible, the dynamics of the board. They need to know whether one board member is more controlling and those who are actually spirit-led. Just because "we have always done it this way" is actually the best way to go.

**PPT Understand Change.** People for the most part resist change. It is a part of the human nature. We get comfortable with doing things a certain way and with that comfort, habits and traditions are formed. Any quick changes by a new pastor will result in resistance. **PPT** Please understand this very important point. If you wish to change things, move slowly, ask for their opinion, use open-ended questions that will allow discussions, and teach.]

**PPT Understand You Need Each Other.** When there is adversity, we often think it is us against them. This concept and thought is totally wrong in the church world. The fact is, we need each other. Everyone plays a very important part of the church. It is up to us as a pastor to lead, teach, and sometimes mold our "team" in making it the very best board possible.

**PPT Understand Teaching Opportunities.** When a pastor faces opposition, they can either view this as an opportunity or view this in various negative ways. Every pastor is to lead and teach by example. Many traditions and habits formed by negative board members have been formed over many years, perhaps affecting and controlling a number of different pastors before you.

Teaching takes time and so does change. Be patient. Pray every day for each board member as well as asking for wisdom and direction for your church.

**PPT Understanding Different Levels.** Pastors come to a church with a vision that God has given to them. Don't be surprised that God has not given the same vision to your board members! The reason is very simple...you are on different levels.

A board member usually gets up in the morning, focuses his/her attention on their work they are trained to do, come home to deal with family issues, and come to church. They read their Bible and pray but they usually don't spend 2-3 hours each day to pray for God to reveal the direction for their church, nor do they spend countless hours dealing with other people in the church spiritually and physically. They are good Christians but their daily focus is usually on them and their family but yet are **trying to make spiritual decisions based on carnal knowledge.** The two do not mix.

You, as a pastor, are called (they are not). You, as a pastor, are seeking God's direction for the whole church and spend hours each day with church-related work (they do not). It is very difficult in getting others to see your *spiritual vision* and heart until you are able to share it and for them to also *take ownership* of it.

**Listed below are a few PPT steps to follow in dealing with a disgruntled board member:**

**PPT Pray.** Pray for wisdom in business, relationally, and in leadership. When we pray, God usually releases His wisdom and gives us a fresh direction to approach others. When we pray for others, we often find that our attitude and patience levels are not where they should be.

**PPT Attitude.** Be in control of your attitude. Display a positive and loving spirit. **PPT** Don't allow negative thoughts or talk effect your emotions.] Just because someone disagrees with you, does that mean that all is lost or that we become as negative as they are?



**PPT Have your Board Members pray for you and a vision for the church.** I have found that most of our boards do not ask God for direction but lean on their own understanding instead of leaning on God for his ultimate wisdom and direction. When board members actually pray for their pastor and the differences, usually God shows them where they may be guilty of not handling everything right also. This can be a teaching moment.

**PPT Lead. PPT** Conduct your meeting in a business and Christian like manner. Allow your meeting to flow without losing control of your meeting. Tell the members that we all can disagree and have different opinions on most any subject but we want to maintain the right spirit in our meetings. We do not need a disagreeable or haughty spirit to exist. Do not dictate or demand. Be patient and display the right kind of Godly spirit for everyone to see.

**PPT Teach. PPT** The board should not be run as a democracy.] Nothing in the Bible teaches this. In many elections, the majority may reign to provide a solution to a position in the church but **PPT** the decisions and direction for the church should always be measured by the Bible.] We cannot compromise as a church in the things of God!!!

**PPT Monitor.** Make sure that your meeting is achieving goals in a timely manner. If there is a disagreement or stalemate to any issue, table it to the next meeting and go on with business. Keep a good positive spirit to each meeting. Do not allow issues to become disagreements.

**PPT Share.** Share the intentions of your meetings. These may include stating that you are either appointed or elected as pastor and that there is no intention of you dictating or controlling this board but would like to see a workable board that understands that we are all in this together. It is not a control issue! You may have to remind the board members that they were elected or appointed just like you and that you are more concerned about the spirit in which we operate, just like God is interested in all of our spiritual operation.

**PPT Instruct roles.** You may have to instruct your board on roles they and you serve. **PPT** Board members may be elected to their position but are not the representatives of church members to carry out their complaints and gripes. **PPT** The board has a function and that is to work equally with the pastor and the pastor being the head.] There should be a good working relationship moving together, not against one another.

**PPT Listen. PPT** Many pastors do not do a great job in listening because we are so busy telling.] It takes some patience but a pastor can win the respect from their board members if they allow their members to share openly and know their concerns are valued. By listening, a pastor can tell the heart of a person. I believe that given time, you can tell the character and heart of a person. You can detect wisdom, a tender heart, and you can also detect certain “hidden issues” that needs that might need to be addressed.

**PPT Friend. PPT** It is good for any pastor to have a friend on the board. This is probably not an actual friend but someone who loves and respects the role of the pastor.]

They can greatly assist you during difficult moments. They can also trustfully advise you when you might be wrong. They can be a safe sounding board for you to share your thoughts or agenda before you actually meet in a board meeting.

**PPT Don't Internalize/Take things personal.** Many who are disgruntled or hard to deal with seem to like to have the power or authority or control. They are not necessarily against you but perhaps being against removing their power. Explore other ways to allow them to have a position of authority but not have the haughty spirit. **PPT** Remember, we don't wrestle with flesh and blood! (Ephesians 6:12) Focus on the spirit rather than perceiving them as personal attacks.

**PPT Confront.** There may be times whenever you might have to talk to a board member in private to work things out. **PPT** Look at Matthew 18. Have your facts together and do this in love.] If things are not reconciled, take a fellow board member with you as a witness in efforts of trying to gain a **win-win** situation of that board member.

**PPT Pick your battles.** There are some things not worth fighting or arguing about. I know of a board member who stated on his deathbed, "The things I thought were so important in life and church work really aren't important at all!" What a wasted time arguing and trying to get his way to only find out later he would have done things much differently. There are battles in which you as a pastor may also have to forget and let go.

**PPT Find Agreement.** Find agreement with any disagreement. Try to end each session with a positive note and summarize that the session may have been difficult but we are moving forward. End each session with prayer.

**PPT Willing.** **PPT** Be willing to admit when you might be wrong and know your limitations.] Most pastors are called into sharing the gospel and are now having to learn the operations of the church. It is not an issue of control, it is about the issue of leading. Use the talents and availability of the people in the church.

**PPT Compliment.** Continually thank your board members for their dedication and service to the church. Board members are human and can be tired in well doing. Encourage, lift them up, and let them know they are important to you and the church.

**PPT Create a Giving Spirit.** Just as the board members and other volunteers in the church donate their services and time for the church, teach a generous spirit. A giving heart is much better than a sacrificial heart. There is something precious about a generous spirit.

**PPT Meet.** Many pastors might meet with board members outside of their regular meetings to get to know them better and to allow that board member to better know the pastor and their family. Do this in the right spirit and not try to use this in a manipulative way to gain favor. Sincerity is best.

**PPT Creative.** Be creative in trying to improve relationships within the church board. By improving relationships and maintaining positive relationships, the leadership is greatly enhanced, ushering in a spirit of unity throughout the church.

**PPT Extreme issues.** If a board member has ethical or moral issues, other ways must be sought on how to address this situation or possibly remove that individual from office. It is best to try to bring a solution by suggesting that individual to voluntarily resign from their position for the sake of the church. Then it is important to restore the person spiritually. If all efforts fail, then more drastic measures have to take place, whether that means to have denominational leaders contacted or the membership addressing the issue.

**PPT Seek counsel.** **PPT** Seek the help of other ministers or mentors that you trust who may be able to help you in any situation. Please understand that advice and wisdom is welcome, but the final decision is yours.] You are called to this church and God will use the talents and abilities you possess to make a difference. Others can be helpful and encouraging but your decisions and actions must be prayerfully decided by you.

These are only a few thoughts about how to handle a difficult or disgruntled board member. Even though you are considered to be the CEO of the church, many pastors rely upon the leadership of their board to help assist them.

If you have a situation that you are facing that seems overwhelming or you cannot seem to find a solution to bring healing to your board, try to remember to go back to prayer to seek God's guidance, develop a workable and perhaps an ever-changing plan of action to help re-direct a disgruntled board member's attitude into a positive one, and remember that small progress or victories is actually making improvement.

**PPT** Please stay true to your calling and following God's direction. He will see you through. Remember, it took a while for the children of Israel to cross over to the promise land.]

### **PPT Keeping Others Informed**

One area where the leader/pastor can hit some pretty rough snags is in assuming that people know what is going on. Or, in thinking everybody knows why the leader/pastor does things as he does. According to **PPT Acts 7:25** Moses ran into this problem, "*For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.*" ] But they didn't. The leader/pastor soon learns to keep the lines of communication open. If he doesn't it can lead to disaster.

*"So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it" (Joshua 21:43).* The tribes that had their farms on the other side of the Jordan returned to their homes.

En route they built an altar by the Jordan River, Joshua 22:10. Then a strange and terrible thing happened. Hearing of the altar and imagining the worst, the rest of the children of Israel made plans to go to war against their brethren for idolatry!

Scripture describes the situation as follows: *“<sup>11</sup>Now the children of Israel herd someone say, ‘Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan—on the children of Israel’s side.’ <sup>12</sup>And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them” (Joshua 22:11, 12).* Imagine that!

After years of war, after years of being comrades in arms they made plans for civil war. Why? It was a simple misunderstanding which arose because the lines of communication were not open. The majority had only “heard” indirectly of the actions of the minority and knew nothing of the reasons behind their actions.

Happily, the majority sent a delegation across the river to determine the facts. The explanation was simple. The altar was *“<sup>26</sup>...not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, <sup>27</sup>but that it may be a witness between you and us and our generations after us, that we may perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, ‘You have no part in the LORD’” (Joshua 22:26, 27).*

When the delegation heard the explanation they were satisfied and the matter was dropped, Joshua 22:30. Disaster was avoided. But note the pattern: hasty suspicion led to false accusations, which led to anger and division, which could have led to war. The leader/pastor must do what he can to prevent such situations by keeping people informed. Plans laid in secret have a way of bringing forth a negative response. **PPT** An active endeavor to help people see what is being done and why it is being done will go a long way in stopping the rumor mill.

Most leaders/pastors agree that good communication is needed and at the same time tremendously difficult. The problem is compounded by the fact that in many cases the real source of dissension and division is the devil. One of his chief tools in disrupting the program of the church and stopping the thrust of the Gospel is to get Christians fighting among themselves. The leader/pastor must do everything he can to maintain a climate of love, peace, and harmony among his people. And that takes effort. *“<sup>2</sup>with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4: 2, 3).*

**PPT** A personal report to the people or an occasional newsletter helps.] Asking people’s advice and letting them in on decisions is very helpful in many ways. For one thing, the leader usually needs all the help he can get. Second, the people know they are in on the action and are making real contributions. This keeps morale high and misunderstandings to a minimum.

## **PPT Twelve Common Troublesome Personalities**

There are people in our churches who make it a practice to be difficult to get along with. They are not your ordinary individual in the church who gets upset every once and awhile. They are different from the person who may yell at you one time or stomp out of a business meeting one time.

### ***Why they are different:***

1. **PPT** They have a tendency to manipulate.] They know that if they go to a meeting and slam something down and walk out that they will table that meeting until another time.
2. **PPT** They know what they are doing.] They have been doing this for a long time. It's not something that is new for them.
3. **PPT** They keep you off balance and they get their way.] We have a tendency to automatically respond to them.

### ***PPT Two things you can expect about them:***

1. **PPT** You can't change them.] Not trying to sell God short here because the only person who can change the is God, but you can't.
2. **PPT** You can understand them.] You don't have to change someone to work effectively or even like them to work effectively with them. If you understand them and not let them manipulate you and you make the choices of what you are going to do, then their not going to control the situation.

We want to learn not to automatically react to them the way they want us to.

You may find yourself in some of these. Don't write your church people's name beside these, they might find your notes.

### **1. PPT Charging Bull**

#### ***Description:***

1. **PPT** Run over other people – don't care who they hurt or offend or put down.
2. **PPT** They know what's best for everybody.
3. **PPT** They put people down.] They mince few words in describing you. Don't get into a name calling fest with the charging bull; they know names you have never heard of before.

#### ***Why:***

1. **PPT** They have never been confronted.] They have gotten by with it all their life.

2. **PPT** They have had some success and because of that they believe their approach is right.
3. **PPT** Sometimes they are right.] It makes it difficult to deal with a bull who is right.

***Coping plan:***

1. **PPT** Stand up for yourself.] If you don't stand up to them they will run over you.
2. **PPT** Look them in the eye.] If you don't they will think you are a wimp.
3. **PPT** Get them off their feet. Get them to sit down.

This is the kind that if they aren't in charge they are board. They make annoying noises to distract.

They may become friendly with you after you stand up for yourself.

They may get aggressive and slap the table and say, "how much time are we going to spend on this anyway."

## **2. PPT Sneaky Snake**

***Description:***

**PPT** A person who sneaks around stirring up things in the background.] They talk behind people's backs. **PPT** They may be friendly to your face but talk behind your back.

**PPT** Why do we call them sneaky snakes? Because you can hear the hissing but can't tell where it is coming from.

***Why:***

**PPT** They are not very powerful. They would like to have the grit of the bull to be able to stand up for themselves but they don't have that.] So they come across at times as a little bit cowardly. They are unsure of themselves.

***Coping plan:***

Let me give you two words on how to deal with this person:

1. **PPT** Expose them
2. **PPT** Isolate them

## **3. PPT Roaring Lion**

***Description:***

**PPT** They are an adult tantrum. They explode. They may be some of your most fun loving people until they want to get their way and then they explode.]

**Why:**

1. **PPT** Very emotional.
2. **PPT** They let things build up inside.] Watch the person that you say something negative about and you come to them to apologize and they say, “Ha, Ha, I didn’t think anything about it.” Watch that person, they are letting things build up.

**Coping plan:**

1. **PPT** Let them run down a little bit. Let them vent that frustration.] If you try to physically restrain somebody who’s upset you will get into a physical confrontation with them. So let them get it out.
2. **PPT** Interrupt them with double statements, like: “hold it, hold it”; Wait a minute, wait a minute”.] They respond better to double statements than single.
3. **PPT** Take a break. Don’t try to deal with the issue then. Lets take a break and then come back in 30 minutes.]

**PPT** When they have blown up and come back to deal with the issue, always be sure the roaring lion deals with the issue.

When they come back to deal or talk with you they are usually apologetic and we have a tendency to let them off the hook. Always make them come back and deal with the issue.

#### **4. PPT Wimpy Weasel**

**Description:**

**PPT** Whine, fuss and complain and find fault. They usually feel like they have a better idea.] They say something like, “We’ve tried to do this half a dozen times, I don’t know why we keep throwing money away on it, or I have a better idea.”

**Why:**

1. **PPT** They are prescriptive – “I know how” or “I know what to do.”
2. **PPT** They feel like they are powerless. Nobody ever listens to me. Our automatic response is, “Well what’s on your mind.”

**Coping plan:**

1. **PPT** Listen to what they have got to say, there is a chance that what they are complaining about is valid.

2. **PPT** Acknowledge without agreeing with.
3. **PPT** Make them be specific.

## 5. **PPT** Heckling Hen

### *Description:*

**PPT** A person who does not want to confront people directly. They have a tendency to go through a third person.

### *Why:*

**PPT** They don't want to accept responsibility for their own actions. They try to give their problem to someone else to deal with it.

Let's say that Karen and Dick and I work together and I am the senior minister in the church. Dick comes to me and he is this heckling hen and he says to me, "Dean, I just can't handle this Karen anymore she's driving me up the wall, she's humming off key all day long and it's just driving me up the wall and you have got to do something about it." Now then, as ministers of the church what do we feel we are responsible to do? Fix it! Our natural tendency is that when people reach out and hand us something is to take it. So here Dick handed me this problem and I reached out and took it. Notice, if I step in between the two of them and it backfires who gets the blame, I do.

### *Coping plan:*

**PPT** Make them accept responsibility for their own action.] Get them to deal with the problem first. **PPT** Get that person to deal with it and then report back to you, it's called accountability.

## 6. **PPT** Tight – Lipped Tiger

### *Description:*

**PPT** A person who is shy, quiet, reserved and introverted.] They are people who have information but want give it to you. **PPT** They withhold vital information.

### *Why:*

**PPT** One reason, they are passive aggressive.] You have five people working on a task force in your church. Five jump in and go to work. This person jumps in and does the work as well, but they usually volunteer for the portion of the task force that will be controlling most of the information. They take that information they have collected and hold that information from the other group. If they withhold it long enough they take control of the group.



### ***Coping plan:***

1. **PPT** Ask open-ended questions.] You are trying to get them to speak up. Example: ask, give me three things you like about this proposal and three things you don't like.
2. **PPT** Set deadlines.] You have to have a definite time frame.
3. **PPT** You may have to be punitive.

Here is what I mean: let's say you are working on this task force together and you've got to give a report to the church at next business meeting which may be two weeks away and you know you have to have that information by Tuesday night meeting or you are not going to be able to have the report ready. So either collectively the four of you go talk to this individual or you choose a spokesman and that person goes and says something like, "Hank, you know its not like you don't have the information, its not that you haven't done your work, we have to have this information by Tuesdays night meeting or if we don't have it by then we are going to be late getting this report to the church; if we are late then I am going to have to let the church know why we are getting this report late." Now I don't run into the church and say, "Well Hank wouldn't give me this information." But if Hank doesn't give me the information, what I need to do when I give the report to the church, I need to say, "We don't have the report ready yet, but we have this information and this information and this information, but we are waiting for this information over here." You know people don't have to be to smart to catch on to who that is.

Now what Hank may do is run into the meeting right before it starts and say, "I don't have the information yet but can I get it to you later." Now what is our natural response "Yes Hank that will be fine."

### **7. PPT Yephound**

#### ***Description:***

**PPT** A person who is a super agreeable person. They agree on everything. Can you help me, "yep, yep" – I have to get it done by four, can you help, "yep, yep."]

**PPT** They have a tendency to take on a lot more than they can get done.

#### ***Why:***

**PPT** They want social approval. It's important for them to be liked.

#### ***Coping plan:***

**PPT** Help them be realistic. Need to ask, “Mary, how many projects are you working on today.” Make her tell you what she is working on, ask for time frames, “How long will it take you for each.”]

Now remember that they like to be liked. So you say something like, “Mary, I appreciate that every time I ask you to do something you are always willing to help. But it would help me more if when I ask you to do something if you don’t have time to do it just tell me.” You are giving them another way to have you to like them other than just taking on another task.

## **8. PPT Chicken Little**

### ***Description:***

**PPT** They are a doomsday person, “The sky is falling.” They are negative and pessimistic. No matter what we do it is going to turn out bad.]

### ***Why:***

1. **PPT** Insecure
2. **PPT** They fear change. They would rather see things turn out badly than see things change for improvement.]

### ***Coping plan:***

1. **PPT** You have to take a positive optimistic stand with Chicken Little.
2. **PPT** Make sure you don’t get drawn in by them.

## **9. PPT Creeping Crab**

### ***Description:***

**PPT** Is a procrastinator. They put things off. They delay and drag their feet or other parts of their anatomy.]

### ***Why:***

1. **PPT** They don’t want to be offensive.] If I accept Steve’s proposal and not Mikes I will offend Mike and if I accept Mikes and not Steve’s then I will offend Steve. So not to offend either I want do anything.
2. **PPT** They are afraid of making wrong decisions.] They would rather not make a decision than to make a wrong one.

### ***Coping plan:***

**PPT** Have you noticed that any job you give this person is always too big?] We don't have enough time, we don't have enough resources.

**PPT** Break the one major project down into smaller projects. Give them smaller things to do until the whole project is done.] They can accept each smaller piece because it isn't so overwhelming. If you are a procrastinator try this.

## **10. PPT Emphatic Elephant**

### *Description:*

**PPT** What are elephants known for? Memory. This is a know-it-all. They know everything about everything.]

**PPT** They have a tendency to be critical of other people, about what they don't know.

They don't ask for input. They already know it all.

### *Why:*

**PPT** They are usually right. You can't say to an emphatic elephant you are all wrong.]

### *Coping plan:*

1. **PPT** Do your homework. Make sure you have as much information as possible on what you are working on.]
2. **PPT** Listen with intensity.] Why? Because they feel that most of what they are sharing with you is going right over your head because you don't have the capacity to handle it. When they ask for feedback give it back to them in the very same language they gave it to you.
3. **PPT** Help them to see that there is more than one right way.] You can't say to them they are wrong because they aren't. You can say to them you have a valid proposal but here is one to.

## **11. PPT Pompous Panther**

### *Description:*

**PPT** The phony know-it-all. They do know some things but don't know as much as they would like people to think they do.]

**PPT** They are very eloquent. Because they can convince you that they know what they are talking about.]

Most of their ideas come off of the top of their head.

**Why:**

**PPT** They want to be admired. They want to be admired without going down the school of hard knocks you went down.] They don't want to go through the training and education, they just want to deal with it on the surface and give you the impression they really know what you are talking about.

**Coping plan:**

**PPT** Help them be factual. Help them to verify what they present.] You don't want to stifle their creativity so you say something like: "Your ideas sound good, but we need some information to back it up."

**12. PPT King Of The Hill**

**Description:**

**PPT** A person who is either a senior minister in the church or a strong lay leader in the church who has the tendency to over react to things you may come to them about, to problems.] You have problems to talk to them about and every time you come to them they blow up.

**Why:**

1. **PPT** They may have the tendency to be over domineering.
2. **PPT** They may be very insecure. They feel like to get their way is to be king of the hill. They try to dominate other individuals.]

Keep this in mind; these people who are senior ministers have not been trained to be senior ministers. They have only been trained to be ministers. They have not been trained to be boss, to be supervisor. These lay leaders have not been trained to be lay leaders. We are not justifying this but just stating a fact.

They have had poor role models.

Keep in mind they are ordinary individuals like we are.

Most of them have little accountability to a congregation.

**Coping plan:**

**PPT** Pre-calling, asking for what you want before you need it. There is a statement you want to use with three phrases:]

1. **PPT** There's something I've been wanting to talk to you about.
2. **PPT** But I've been reluctant to.

3. **PPT** I'm afraid of how you are going to react.

**PPT** Now when I approach this person I don't go in and say, "We've got a problem."

**PPT** Most senior ministers or bosses will say, "What's on your mind. I don't want to go in threatening and intimidating.] I don't want to go in and say, "You're not communicating with the people of this church," "You're not doing this..." Instead if there is a problem with communicating and the person says to me, "what's on your mind" then I want to say to them, "We seem to be having a problem with communication in our staff, I want you to help me with it."

### **PPT 7 Ways To Respond When You Want To Punch Someone—And You're A Christian—By Carey Nieuwhof**

Feel like you want to punch someone? Or at least not deal with them anymore?

What do you do when the person in question goes to your church?

How do you handle that tension when you're a ... *Christian*?

**PPT** It's strange, but being a Christian doesn't automatically make you good at resolving conflict.] In fact, many Christians and many churches are *terrible* at it.

**PPT** Unresolved—or poorly resolved—conflict sinks a lot of potential in the church. It also causes thousands of staff and volunteers to leave every year. And it makes millions of church goers simply miserable.]

Fun, isn't it?

Chances are you already know exactly what I'm talking about. Even better. You know exactly *who* I'm talking about.

**PPT** Many Christians and churches are terrible at resolving conflict. Why?

**PPT** In the United States alone, 70 percent of the people who will go to work today will tell you they don't like their jobs. I don't think that's just an American issue. It's a people issue.]

**PPT** So many people I know get frustrated at work. And one of the top frustrations? *The people they work with.*]

**PPT** Ditto for church world (no stat ... I've just visited enough churches to feel comfortable saying that).

Sometimes the people we're most frustrated with are the people we work with (staff and

volunteers) and the people we worship with.

How do you fix that without becoming a jerk or letting the tension simmer unresolved?

### **PPT Why Do Christians Struggle With Conflict So Much?**

Before we jump to how to resolve conflict, let's understand why we have it.

First, on this side of heaven conflict is inevitable. But that said, **PPT** here's why I think Christians often struggle with conflict:

**PPT** In the name of grace, Christians sacrifice truth.

**PPT** In the name of truth, Christians sacrifice grace.

**PPT** We worry about **hurting other people's feelings**, when really one of the best things we can do is offer honest feedback.

**PPT** And in the end, we're not sure how to **support someone we genuinely disagree with**; we swing the extremes: We avoid the situation or we blow it up.

None of that needs to be.

In the name of truth, Christians sacrifice grace. In the name of grace, Christians sacrifice truth.

### **PPT 7 Healthy Ways to Resolve Tension and Conflict**

I have learned (through trial and error), that these seven strategies below can help me deal with conflict.

I hope they can help you.

They can work with coworkers, with a boss, with a volunteer, with a friend—with anyone you have a relationship with.

Here are 7 ways that I hope can help you resolve conflict with someone you work with:

#### **1. PPT Own your part of the problem.**

**PPT** Conflict and even bad chemistry is almost never 100% one person's fault.

One of the best expressions I've heard on how to figure out the extent to which you might be part of the problem is to ask a compelling question: What's it like to be on the other side of me?

## 2. **PPT Go direct.**

**PPT** Issues in the church are often mishandled because we talk *about* someone rather than *to* someone.

Your co-worker at the water cooler isn't the problem, so why talk to him about it?

Jesus was crystal clear on how to handle conflict, but very few Christians follow his practice.

In the name of being 'nice' (I can't tell her that!), we become ineffective.

**PPT** Talk to the person you have the problem with. Directly. Or else just be quiet about it.

**PPT** Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church says, "When your nose does get bent out of joint—not if but when—you have a biblical responsibility to take the high road of conflict resolution."

**PPT** That means going directly to the person with whom you're having this conflict rather than building a guerrilla team to ambush this person later.

He goes on to say: In staff meetings or in front of the congregation, we say, **PPT** "If someone whose nose is bent out of joint comes to you for a 'Won't you join my cause?' conversation, you have a biblical responsibility to interrupt mid-sentence and say, 'I think you're talking to the wrong person. Please go to the individual with whom you're having this conflict and seek to resolve it in a God-glorifying way.'"

## 3. **PPT Give them the benefit of the doubt.**

**PPT** The person you're upset with might not realize how they are coming across. It's OK to say that out loud.

"Rachel, you might not realize this, but sometimes your emails can come across as demanding or even demeaning. I'm not sure you're aware of that, but I just wanted to let you know how they leave me feeling sometimes."

That gives the person an out, and frankly, many times, they probably had no idea they were coming across negatively.

Giving a person an out and the benefit of the doubt preserves their dignity.

## 4. **PPT Explain. Don't blame.**

*How* to talk to the person you're struggling with is where many people struggle.

And those conversations often go sideways because people begin with blame.

Don't blame. Explain.

**PPT** Instead of saying “You always” or “You never” (which might be how you feel like starting), begin by talking about how you experience them.

If you're dealing with an 'angry person' for example, you might frame it this way: “Jake, I just want you to know that when you get upset in a meeting, it makes me feel like the discussion is over and I can't make a contribution.”

If you're dealing with gossip, try something like: “Ryan, on Tuesday when you told me what happened to Greg on the weekend, I felt like that was something Greg should have told me directly.”

Do you hear the difference between explaining and blaming?

#### **5. PPT Be specific.**

Giving one or two specific incidents is much better than making general accusations or commenting on personality traits. “The other day in the meeting” or “In your email on the August numbers yesterday” is much more helpful than “You just always seem so frustrated.”

**PPT** The more specific you are, the more you de-escalate conflict and move toward a hopeful ending.

#### **6. PPT Tell them you want things to get better.**

**PPT** What the person you're confronting needs is hope.

At this point, they probably feel defensive, ashamed and (hopefully) sorry.

**PPT** Let them know the gifts they bring to the table and the good they do.

#### **7. PPT Pray for them.**

I know this sounds trite, but it's not. **PPT** Don't pray *about* them. Pray *for* them.

**PPT** It is almost impossible to stay angry with someone you pray for.

It can also give you empathy for them, and at least in your mind's eye, it places you both firmly at the foot of the cross in need of forgiveness.

It will take any smirk of superiority out of your attitude, which goes a long way toward solving problems.



## **PPT Preempting board conflict**

Stopping conflict on the governing board/local administrative council is a very delicate thing. We have to “guard the gate.” It’s too late to try to build unity after we’ve allowed a contentious or divisive person on the board.

Guarding the gate is delicate and dangerous. To pull it off, some key questions need to be answered.

**1. PPT *What is the board’s primary purpose?* PPT** Is the primary purpose of a church board representation or leadership? Our answer significantly affects our potential for unity.

Many churches have opted for the **PPT representative model**. It fits well with our American democratic principles, as well as one of our most cherished doctrines, the priesthood of believers. It insures that everyone has a chance to be heard, not just those who are powerful or well connected.] And it is one way to guarantee the board stays in touch with the needs of the congregation.

**PPT** But in a board of representatives, the emphasis on representing various interest groups makes it difficult to justify keeping anyone off the board. From a representative perspective, any church member, no matter how divisive, has a right to lead.]

It’s also harder to come to a consensus when faced with controversial issues. By definition, **PPT** a representative board seeks to protect minority opinions; this often results in a stalemate rather than a solution.

Finally, members of a representative board can start to see themselves as lobbyists. Jack may become the champion of traditional worship, while John defends the youth. Meanwhile, Susan fights for the rights of the Sunday school. Forgotten in the fray can be the most important thing: finding and carrying out God’s will.

For these reasons, and others, I’ve become a strong advocate of **PPT a leadership-oriented board**. Rather than figure out what everybody wants them to do, the members of a leadership board have only one focus: finding the best course of action and following it.] When faced with a difficult decision, they ask first not “how will people react?” but “what does God want us to do?”

**PPT** We help to preempt board conflict when we establish the board not as representatives but as leaders. Changing that mindset will require teaching and preaching in that area.]

**2. PPT *What are our minimum qualifications?* PPT** In many churches, anyone who faithfully supports the church and works hard eventually finds himself or herself rewarded with a seat on the board. **PPT** But there are spiritual qualifications, and they don’t stop at being born again.] They go way beyond to issues of character. That’s not so much a matter of what a person knows as who he is.

Some of the most self-centered and divisive people in the church are highly gifted, know the Bible inside out, and exhibit a zeal that puts most people to shame. But when they get on your board, watch out!

As important as spiritual maturity is, though, to build a harmonious and effective leadership team there are other qualifications to look for:

- **PPT** Is this person in basic agreement with our current philosophy of ministry?
- **PPT** Will this person fit the leadership team we've already assembled?

If the answer to either is no, we've found it is a mistake to add the person to the board, no matter how spiritually mature he might be. There is no guarantee that spiritually mature people will work well together. When their convictions are strongly held and mutually exclusive (as were Paul and Barnabas's plans for dealing with John Mark), terrible things can happen. That's why it's important to have philosophical and relational qualifications as well as spiritual ones.

Imagine a pulpit committee deciding that the only qualifications necessary in a pastor were spiritual maturity and pastoral gifts. If they failed to consider the importance of a good fit with the congregation, they'd be asking for trouble. It seldom works, for example, to bring a blue-collar pastor into a white-collar congregation. Any wise pulpit committee, wanting to see a long and successful ministry, would obviously take these things into consideration. Is a good fit any less important when it comes to selecting lay leaders?

The more fully our qualifications are thought out, and the more strictly they're held, the greater will be our chances of experiencing a harmonious and healthy board.

**3. PPT *Who should guard the gate?* PPT** Every church has gatekeepers, the folks who nominate. **PPT** Unfortunately, even churches that are careful when choosing a governing board can be casual when deciding who will control the initial selection. **PPT** Having a nominating committee is one of the best things we have ever done in the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

In one church an announcement was made asking anyone who wanted to serve on the nominating committee to show up the next Tuesday night in the fellowship hall. Other churches throw open the process to anyone willing to come to an all-church business meeting a month before the election. Those methods will never help preempt board conflict. Why? Because no matter how out of line a nomination may be, hardly anyone will be willing to speak out against it in a public meeting.

Choosing leaders is a very selective process. **PPT** The nominating committee may be the most important committee in your church, because it serves like the headwaters of a river. [If there's pollution upstream, it will eventually defile everything downstream.]

**PPT** One person, I believe, should always be involved in the process: the senior pastor.] I realize that in some polities the pastor isn't allowed to take an official role in the nominating process, but even in those situations, a pastor can exercise a great deal of informal influence. **PPT** By definition, a healthy and effective leadership team demands a good working relationship between the pastor and the board. It seems foolish to

knowingly put someone on the board with whom the pastor is at personal or philosophical odds.]

**PPT** I'm not suggesting the pastor hand pick board members. But I am suggesting the pastor be given the opportunity to speak out against the nomination of someone who will cause nothing but conflict.]

That opportunity will do us no good, however, if we lack the courage to use it. I've talked to many pastors who served as an ex-officio member of the nominating committee but felt it was inappropriate to offer input. If I'm not willing to speak up, why be there? And if I'm there and stay silent, I'm not sure I have a right to complain later about the people on the board. The nominating committee is like a wedding: speak now or forever hold my peace.

The author of this article says he remembers the first time he vetoed a nomination. Numerous members of the congregation had put a godly man, with a totally different philosophy of leadership than the boards, forward. He says, when our nominating committee came to his name, there was an uncomfortable silence. Everyone knew he wouldn't fit the leadership team. The problems would be philosophical, not spiritual, but problems nonetheless. After what seemed like an eternity, I swallowed hard and spoke up: "I don't think we should have him run; we'll spend all our meetings going around in circles." A couple of others were quick to agree. It was obvious that others felt as strongly as I did, but no one had said a word until I broke the ice.

Obviously, his decision to get involved in the process held some risk. As one friend keeps asking, "How can you do that without being killed?" Actually, it has never created a problem, because we keep strict confidentiality. And in case members of the nominating committee forget that, he reminds them before every meeting!

But I'll admit that getting involved in the selection process can be risky for a pastor. Secrets are hard to keep, and a pastoral veto has the potential for creating hurt. So you must always be careful with what you say and how you say it. We all hope things we say won't be repeated, but we must make sure we can live with them if they are.

He says that his decision to become an outspoken member of the nominating committee didn't come easily. It went against the advice of some of his most trusted mentors. But, after prayerful and careful consideration, he figured he had little to lose. He had witnessed the results of silence too many times.

This article is by Larry Osborne; he is the senior pastor at North Coast Church in San Diego.

### **PPT Animal Instincts**

*Five ways church members will react in a fight.*

By Norman Shawchuck and Robert Moeller

The women's ministries board was meeting, and you could cut the tension with a spatula.

"If the church won't provide baby sitters for the Friday Bible study, I won't be coming back," Susan said, her voice trembling with anger. "I don't need to spend my Friday mornings in a nursery, changing diapers and holding crying babies, when I can do that at home. I come here for a break, not more work. And I'm not the only one who feels this way. Other young mothers besides me are planning to quit the Bible study unless the church begins providing paid child care."

"Susan," said Helen, an older woman on the board, "I think I understand why some of the older women oppose paying baby sitters. They're concerned about the costs. When we were your age, we all took turns in the nursery. None of us expected a free ride. While I don't necessarily agree, some feel your generation isn't willing to make sacrifices."

"But I have an idea. Why don't the mothers care for the nursery one week, and the other week we'll pay for child care from the dues gathered at Bible study?"

"That's not good enough," Susan said firmly. "It's fully-funded child care every Friday, or we walk."

"I think we should drop the whole issue and plan our fall retreat," Denise said nervously, sitting at the other end of the table. "We're all believers, and we shouldn't be arguing like this. Someone will get hurt."

The group paused for a moment, then went on with the debate.

"Excuse me," Denise whispered, "I just remembered my son forgot his lunch at home today." She stood and hurriedly exited the room, avoiding eye contact with anyone.

"I think this whole problem is my fault," Iola said. "When I was president last year, I should have started collecting money for babysitting. I'll be happy to serve in the nursery, and I've got a little nest egg at home that would pay sitters for the rest of the year."

The group knew Iola, an elderly woman, a "mother" to everyone in the church, lived on a fixed income and couldn't afford such an expense. Susan and Helen agreed that letting Iola pick up the tab wasn't the answer.

Eunice, the pastor's wife, was the last to speak. "There's a way to solve this problem, but it isn't by forcing a vote today. This isn't a battle to be won or lost; it's a problem to be solved. We need to reexamine the goals of the group and see if there are ways to accomplish them that will also strengthen our relationships. Resolving this may take time, but we'll be a stronger group for it."

Seated at the end of the linen-covered table was Alice, the current president of the women's ministries. What should she do?

## **PPT Instincts for Survival**

**PPT** These women displayed a variety of conflict management styles—from aggressive confrontation to complete avoidance.] Most likely these women follow the same style of handling conflict elsewhere, for we all develop survival responses in threatening situations.

**PPT** Corporate psychologists have labeled these responses with animal names (for the solutions they seek): sharks ("I win; you lose"), foxes ("Everyone wins a little and loses a little"), turtles ("I withdraw"), teddy bears ("I'll lose so you can win"), and owls ("Let's find a way for everyone to win").

## **PPT Fins in the Baptistry**

**PPT** Sharks tend to be domineering, aggressive, and open to any solution as long as it's the one they want.] **PPT** Sharks use whatever it takes to prevail: persuasion, intimidation, power plays.] Sharks don't always appear menacing and may even possess a quiet demeanor, but make no mistake—they play to win, even if others lose.

Susan probably learned early in life that shark-like aggressiveness helped her survive threatening situations, and she carried that into adulthood. Though she lacked gray skin and three rows of teeth, she still approached the baby-sitting issue in Jaws-like fashion.

Her threat to lead a walkout was a classic shark tactic. Either she and her friends would get their way, or they would fold their chairs and vacate the study.

**PPT** There are dangers in always giving sharks their way. When "I must win" individuals are allowed to rule the church, anger builds in others, people feel coerced, and a dangerous dependency on the strong-willed individual develops.]

## **PPT Foxes in the Vineyard**

**PPT** Helen was not a competitor but a compromiser. Typical of the wily fox, she hoped to slice the pie so everyone believed they got the biggest piece.]

Helen's suggestion that they split the childcare between the young mothers and paid sitters was her attempt to help everyone win-a-little, lose-a-little. She sincerely wanted to keep the group from splitting over the child-care issue.

**PPT** Unfortunately, in the church, compromise has gotten a bad name. **PPT** In some circles it's a synonym for worldliness or moral laxity. But in organizational terms, a compromiser is defined as a person sincerely working through bargaining and conciliation to keep a group from breaking apart.]

**PPT** Foxes are flexible, and their primary interest is the common good. If people don't immediately respond to their bargain, they aren't above arm-twisting and manipulation to impose an agreement.] Helen planned some behind-the-scenes negotiating to persuade both parties to accept her solution.

**PPT** Sometimes a split-the-difference approach sensibly solves minor disputes. If one group likes dill pickles, and the other sweet, why not put out two dishes?]

**PPT** But compromise isn't always the answer. It can leave people half-satisfied and half-committed to the solution. In that case, the problem will emerge again later in a different form.]

Helen believed she was pursuing both parties' interests. But her solution didn't address the underlying issues of ownership and control of the Bible study. Even if others accepted her compromise, these issues would eventually re-emerge.

### **PPT Avoidance in a Half-Shell**

Denise grew up in an abusive home. She now was a young mother and favored the church subsidizing child-care, but she was afraid to say so. She learned as a girl that when others fight, she got hurt. And, if she disagreed and said so, she got hurt even more. Her response to every threatening situation was to avoid the problem at all costs. Denise had become a turtle.

**PPT** Turtles are so frightened by conflict that they pull into their shell. A world without conflict is the only one they can survive in, so they flee altercation.] **PPT** Some actually walk out, as Denise did, while others withdraw into emotional neutrality and numbness.]

Because turtles abhor conflict, they are often mistaken for peacemakers. But avoiding thorny issues simply to preserve the peace unwittingly sets up the church for major problems.

**PPT** At times, avoiding conflict makes sense. Proverbs reminds us it is the glory of a person to overlook an insult. We ought to choose carefully which hills we are willing to die on. Some battles aren't worth fighting.]

But pulling into a shell as a long-term strategy for coping with serious conflict simply won't work.

**PPT** Turtles, while appearing to be peaceable and gentle souls, often are hiding great reservoirs of anger and frustration.] Denise appeared calm and sedate, but inside she struggled with unresolved rage and bitterness. She never felt the freedom or confidence to confront her abusive past and carried the resentment in her soul.

Denise couldn't accept even temporary tension to help the group reach a satisfying solution.

### **PPT Cuddly and Accommodating**

Iola's willingness to provide the babysitting herself and to blame herself for the controversy is typical of the most lovable creature in the conflict management menagerie—the teddy bear.

**PPT** In a threatening situation, teddy bears readily surrender their own interests to accommodate the disagreeing party.] Iola never expressed her own opinion on the child-care issue but immediately attempted to placate Susan and the young mothers.

**PPT** Teddy bears will maintain peace at almost any price. **PPT** They attempt to steer others away from controversial issues. **PPT** They show increased personal concern for the others, working to create a relaxed, easygoing, “loving atmosphere.”

Who could fault Iola for trying to solve the dilemma herself? Her generosity was commendable. That's why teddy bears are often seen as super-spiritual. **PPT** In sacrificial fashions they attempt to atone for the problem in the group by bearing it themselves.

**PPT** Such accommodation has an upside. Surrendering our selfish goals in pursuit of peace is often a sign of godliness and maturity.] If someone wants roast beef rather than turkey served at the Christmas luncheon, though my diet won't allow it, it's not worth dividing the group over. I'll bring my own lunch and microwave it.

But there's a downside to the teddy-bear approach. Was it wrong for the young mothers to express their needs? Was it wrong for the older women to bring up their financial concerns? No. Both were expressing legitimate points of view. But Iola, like all teddy bears, believed relationships are more important than issues, and therefore any disagreement is bad.

**PPT** Teddy bears unintentionally give sharks a false sense of rightness.] On a personal level, though they appear cheerful and easy-going, accommodators can often struggle with inner anger over always giving in.

No one knew it, but Iola was tired of trying to keep the Friday Bible study together and planned to quit in the spring.

### **PPT Spotting the Collaborative Owl**

**PPT** Eunice alone saw the baby-sitting controversy as a problem to be solved, not a battle to be won or lost. Her desire was to see everyone leave the table with a win-win solution.]

**PPT** Such collaborators “co-labor” with all parties until they arrive at a mutually satisfying solution. Their strength lies in their willingness to stay with a task or problem until it's solved.]

Collaborators see disputes as an opportunity to strengthen a group, not destroy it. Eunice wasn't afraid of the child-care issue. She recognized it as a symptom of a generation gap in the group, an opportunity to address the larger issue of how the older and younger women would share control and ownership of the Bible study.

**PPT** Eunice's goal was not to overcome or avoid adversaries but to help them understand and appreciate each other's needs.

**PPT** *Here's how she eventually helped the group solve the dilemma.*

**1. PPT Generate as much useful information as possible.]** Eunice arranged for a meeting of young mothers and older women. She asked the young mothers why paid childcare was so important to them. As they explained their busy schedules-many had part-time jobs to help make ends meet-the older women were surprised to learn how stressful their lives were. As Susan explained how her newborn seldom slept entire nights, they could see that exhaustion, not laziness, was behind her request to be relieved of baby-sitting duties.

As the younger women heard the older ladies, several of whom were widows, explain their difficulties in living on fixed incomes, they realized most couldn't afford higher dues on Fridays to pay for child care. They assumed it would be expensive.

Both groups learned the other brought different needs to the study. The younger women wanted a rest; the older women wanted companionship. That helped to filter misconceptions and wrong conclusions out of the discussion.

**2. PPT Help the group see where they agree.]** Eunice helped both sides see where they agreed and where they didn't. Everyone agreed they benefited from both older and younger women participating. They all believed that sharing their struggles and praying together helped them cope with their problems. And they all agreed they didn't want the group to split.

One major difference remained. While there was a consensus that the economic burden of childcare should be distributed, the group still disagreed on how. Some continued to support the every-other-week plan, while others wanted weekly subsidized childcare.

**3. PPT Bring everyone into the decision-making process and motivate them to personally commit to the final agreement.**

Eunice, the owl, knew people tend to support solutions they help create, so she had the group brainstorm alternative ideas. One of the women suggested they hold a fundraiser with the goal of raising enough money to pay for a year's worth of babysitting.

They decided on a holiday boutique sale. Several older women agreed to sew quilts, which typically sold for several hundred dollars in retail shops. The added benefit of the



project was companionship; they could work on them together, filling up some of the empty time during the holiday seasons when loneliness was a problem.

As for the younger women, several ran home-based computer businesses and agreed to generate mailing lists and publicity for the sale. Others had talent in watercolor and pottery and agreed to sell some of their work at the boutique and donate the profit to the project.

As a result the women's ministries held the most successful fund-raising event in the church's history, and they grew closer to one another in the process.

**PPT** While the millennium didn't arrive, the shark, the fox, the turtle, the teddy bear, and the owl, did learn to live with one another. The Wild Kingdom had been tamed.

—From the book *Leading Your Church Through Conflict and Reconciliation* (Bethany House, 1997)

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