

# VLSA VOICE

The Victoria Legal Support Staff Association – Established 1974  
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**VLSA Annual Silent Auction 2015**  
**Help Fill A Dream Foundation**

*Happy  
Holidays!*





## CONFLICT

**There is a Silver Lining**  
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*“If I were to summarize in one sentence the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. This principle is the key to effective interpersonal communication.” – Stephen Covey*

It is safe to say that no matter how effective a group of people are at communicating, conflict will occur, it's natural and it likely will be uncomfortable. We all deal with conflict differently and have different ways of coping. Some of us are more skilled at dealing with it than others. This in itself is not a negative thing. It just is.

Although conflict in the workplace is inevitable there are contributing factors that can increase the likelihood of conflict.

1. Lack of resources;
2. Unclear job descriptions or roles;
3. Organizational transitions, mergers, acquisitions, layoffs;
4. Unpredictable leadership.

When there is a lack of resources, whether it be financial, manpower, tools and/or equipment it is increasingly important to communicate with staff and to be proactively looking for solutions. Long term, a lack of resources diminishes the health of employees and contributes to stress and burnout.

People are able to operate at their optimum when there is structure and clarity, ensure that you operate with clear job descriptions and definitions of roles. Providing this ensures that there are no dropped balls and tasks and responsibilities are not left up to interpretation.

Organizational transitions, mergers, acquisitions and layoffs are unpredictable situations. When there is unpredictability, there is heightened fear. Fear in turn creates speculation, interpretation and rumours. In these situations it is imperative that communication throughout the organization be frequent, cohesive across all departments and provide clear answers whenever possible.

Unpredictable leadership creates uncertainty. Unable to trust their leader's ability to handle a situation people quickly lose faith. Leaders need to efficiently address the gaps in their leadership especially when the gaps impact their relationship with those they lead. Learning to resolve conflict is an important part of leadership. Unresolved conflict builds upon itself creating larger, more complicated situations. This kind of conflict has repercussions, great people leave. Cooperation and collaboration exits the organization.

While it is important to minimize factors that contribute to increasing conflict it is equally important to accept that conflict actually has a silver lining. Differing opinions are usually not the source of negativity; the more likely culprit is our reaction to these differences. When we learn to accept difference and to understand objectively others' viewpoints we create the opportunity to hear how others might approach a challenge or obstacle differently. With the right attitude, conflict can be a healthy experience. Rules

of conduct or engagement will help create a safe structure so that all parties are heard and all opinions are valued. Within the safety of this structure, employees are then able to utilize conflict with the intention of stimulating innovation, learning and collaboration.

*"Whenever you are in conflict with someone, there is one fact that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude." – William James*

#### **IMPLEMENTING WHAT YOU LEARNED:**

1. How do you handle conflict?
2. Review your company's conflict resolution policies; how effective are you at ensuring policy is adhered to?
3. List three acceptable and three unacceptable behaviours when dealing with conflict.
4. If you were to engage in healthy conflict, what would that look and sound like?
5. What might be possible for you and your organization if you were to harness the power of healthy conflict?