

# Dealing with Conflict and Drama

*EPPIIC Leadership at Millersville University*

Here's an article from America's Student Leadership Trainer<sup>sm</sup> and America's Community Service Advocate<sup>sm</sup>, Dave Kelly...

“Conflict in clubs and organizations can be the big “Ouch.” It hurts, it's not fun. But, it happens for lots of reasons. When it happens, you have to be ready to deal with it. During my 30+ years of experience as a student leader, advisor, and speaker, I have 5 concepts that I share and put into practice to deal with conflict resolution.

## **Dave's 5 Concepts of Conflict Resolution.**

1. “If you have a problem with someone and do not take it to them, then it can't be very significant.” This was shared with me when I was the District Governor for Wisconsin-Upper Michigan Circle K and it has stuck with me for more than 30 years. If you have a conflict or issue with someone, then who is the only person that can solve it? Them!

Too many times we talk to everyone else but the person with whom we have an issue and then wonder why it doesn't get resolved or go away. It's like the game we played as kids called “Telephone” where someone says something at one end of the line and then it passes from one person to another and ends up nothing like what it started out to be. In my presentations, I tell my problem to the person nearest to me and by the time it gets around to the other side of the room, the last person looks at me and says, “I understand you had something to do with the Great Depression!” First of all, that happened *way* before I was born and second of all, it is illustrative of what happens when we do not take our problem directly to the person with whom we have an issue.

If you choose not to get over an issue, then it's time to take it to the person and discuss it. This should be done one-on-one. You might bring an impartial third party to help mediate but they have to clearly be neutral in the dispute. You don't want the other party to feel ganged up on.

2. “Deal with conflict one-on-one: praise in public, criticize in private.” Most people like to be praised publicly for something they have done for the group or an accomplishment they have earned. Not all, but most. There are some people who are not comfortable with

public recognition, but they will usually accept it.

No one wants to be criticized in public, however. It can be embarrassing, debilitating, and make them feel unwanted or unworthy. Some people who are criticized in public may lose their cool and explode in a dramatic flourish of hysteria that can't be taken back and probably won't be forgotten by others. A serving leader should have enough respect for the dignity of individuals to deliver criticism in private. "Hey, do you have a few minutes to talk after the meeting?" Then calmly discuss the issue or concern without accusation and offer to help resolve the matter. It is possible they may still lose it, but at least it will only be with you and not the whole group. If that happens, reassure them everything that was discussed and said is only between the two of you... and keep it that way!

3. "Use the 3 C method: compliment, criticize, compliment." I call this the compliment sandwich, where you praise a person on both sides of a critique. Such as, "Hey Ronnie, you have so many great ideas, but when you talk out of turn it disrupts the meeting. So, raise your hand when you have input and then we can all focus on your awesomeness!" See? Compliment, criticize, compliment.

Unlike my high school English teacher, Miss Due, who on the first day of class our senior year saw Ronnie being disruptive and said to him, "You sir, are a creep, sir." And Ronnie was disruptive the entire semester. Someone did point out once that Miss Due did use the compliment sandwich by calling him "sir" on both ends of the statement, but calling someone a creep in the middle of the sandwich is not what I have in mind.

4. "Separate the person from the position." Who you are is not what you do. You may be a great member and get elected to a leadership position. Maybe you are very popular and everyone thinks that would make a good club president. Or maybe you missed the meeting when you got voted into something and decided to go ahead and give it your best.

And maybe you found out that you were in over your head and not cut out for this role. Perhaps you have such a heavy academic load that you cannot devote the time necessary to successfully fulfill the duties of the position. You might have family stuff happening or work that gets in the way. This does not mean you are not a good person or a bad member. Perceptions, however, sometimes turn into realities and others may look unfavorably upon you because of your performance in a leadership role. Is that fair? No. But, we sometimes do this when we see other people in this circumstance. Work with people in order to help them be better in their positions and, if they still don't get it, give them an opportunity to either ask for a second person to work with them, like an assistant

secretary, or even step away from the role.

Separate the person from the position so you can keep them as a member and as a friend. The next concept pairs with this in helping them have a graceful way out...

5. “Address the situation by asking a direct question.” During my first year as the District Administrator of Georgia Circle K, we had a member of our district board who not fulfilling his role as Lt. Governor. The governor needed to either get him back on track or have him resign so that someone else could be put in the position. I suggested she meet with him and lay out all of his responsibilities that had been covered during training and explain that he needed to do them. She offered to work with him to come up with a plan for doing so.

During the meeting, she gave him the list of duties and asked if he thought he could fulfill them all. He pointed out three or four of them that he liked and felt he could do, but there were five or six that he didn't want to do or didn't feel he could complete successfully. She calmly told him that he was required to do all of them and if he couldn't, then they needed to come up with a resolution to the situation. She asked, “Given that these are the requirements, do you want to continue as Lt. Governor?” After thinking for a few moments he said, “If I have to do all of these things, then I don't think I want to stay in the position.” He resigned and our governor appointed a new person in his place who did a great job finishing out the term. No fuss, no muss. She addressed the situation with a direct question and he resigned in a way that was respectful and allowed him to continue as a member of the organization without embarrassment.

Conflict does not have to hurt. If serving leaders work at it, they can come up with solutions that work for everyone!”

**Resource:**

This article came directly from a weekly email that America's Student Leadership Trainer<sup>sm</sup> and America's Community Service Advocate<sup>sm</sup>, Dave Kelly, created called...

# Valued Client Tune-Up **TUESDAY**

Dave Kelly  
America's Student Leadership Trainer<sup>sm</sup>



The Center for Student Involvement and Leadership brought Dave Kelly to be the keynote speaker at our Student Organization Leadership Symposium in September of 2019. Millersville University student leaders really learned a lot from Dave, and enjoyed having on campus. He was a great person to work with and really cares about student leadership development! Dave has given us permission to share this email as a resource for you. Check out Dave's [website](#) and follow him on [social media](#)!

If you have any questions or would like further assistance on this topic, please contact



Millersville University

CENTER FOR STUDENT  
INVOLVEMENT & LEADERSHIP

CSIL@millersville.edu  
717-871-7056