

Conflict Resolution Workshop

By Rick Grotton

Causes for conflict and how to deal with it.

What is the number one cause of loss of Grange membership? Many of you may be thinking death, however, there is something greater; in house conflicts and fighting. How many of you have experienced this happening? What were the results? Did you lose membership?

There are various solutions that can very well be avoided to suppress negative feelings and tensions, but you must be aware of what causes these unfortunate happenings and learn ways to deal with them. Let us elaborate on the conditions that cause hard feelings in the first place.

Controlling or bossy persons. Most Granges seem to have a member who likes to be in control and throws out orders for others. Most members will not step up or challenge that person; however, tensions slowly simmer and finally erupt causing chaos.

Officer positions. Every member should pay attention during installions and degree work to educate themselves with the duties of their office. Those who are a Master/President should respect the duties of their office and not treat the position as a “power” position. The M/P is a facilitator of the meeting, ensuring that the meeting flows in an orderly fashion. They do not implicate their own agenda and while wearing their sash, do not impose their opinions upon the membership. The M/P and the Secretary are the noted contacts for each Grange. The M/P selects the committee heads and is a member of each committee but does not control the actions of the committees. Many members do not challenge the views and actions of the M/P since many times they are unaware of the duties of that position. This is where educating all members about all positions is valuable. This has been a problem for many years, resulting in a great loss of membership.

Cliques. Whenever a problem arises, people seem to automatically take sides with their friends until the problem escalates out of proportion, causing disrespect and heated arguments. People try to compete without working together, and nobody wants to be “wrong”. These attitudes are disrespectful to membership, and nothing productive seems to get done as far as projects to help the community. These tensions seem to linger and are disrespectful to the Good of the Order.

So, how do we deal with such conflicts? Most of the time, these conflicts can be resolved from within, especially if you have a mentor or a good negotiator within your membership. If the M/P is not the problem, then they would be a good choice or someone appointed by them to resolve the problem. Every now and then a situation arises that has no immediate solution. We are unique individuals with diverse thoughts and feelings. We tend to agree to disagree to some point, however, if unresolved, the situation at hand slows down the progress of the Granges and spreads to members who were not involved in the original conflict. The problem then festers and shows its ugly face. What once could have been resolved is now out of control. It is now time to bring in a mediator or an outside person such as your deputy, the State Master or someone appointed by her. I have had experience in this area as appointed by former State Masters to resolve the conflict or to work with them to ease the tensions. So how do you go about resolving conflicts?

The mediator must be non-biased, levelheaded, focused, and with their only intention to solve the problem. Be non-judgmental. Not every problem can be solved and sometimes results in hurt feelings. However, most disputes can be resolved with limited damage or none.

Prepare for the case. Do not attack the issue without preparation as it will likely not be able to be resolved, or it will cause more harm. Have a copy of the State and National Grange By-Laws with you. This will help resolve many disputes based on procedural issues. Be aware of the type of conflict first which includes the people involved, the reason for the conflict, and how long this problem has existed. Does the problem involve the entire membership or just a couple of people? Bring a deputy or State Officer if needed.

Plan your approach. Find a relaxed setting to hold the meeting. Stay relaxed and friendly, thus setting the tone for the resolve. A relaxed friendly atmosphere will soften some tensions for all involved. Set a time limit for the parties to explain their thoughts. Based on the situation, you may prefer to talk to each involved party alone then make suggestions based on your observations. Take notes if needed. The suggestions given by you are meant to let the parties think of possible ways that they can resolve the conflict on their own; whether it be a clash of personalities or misunderstandings.

After analyzing the situation, set the ground rules. Take control of the meeting by explaining why you are there, the procedures that are to be followed, and to answer the questions you ask honestly. Let them know you are in charge, and each side will have a chance to express their views of the conflict. Interfere only when the situation wanders from the topic or if you believe things said are inappropriate and not relevant to the topic at hand. Keep control at all times. Are the parties involved able to talk things out with each other with your presence? Step in when needed. Do NOT tell them what they should do to resolve the conflict. Offer suggestions only. If the parties cannot resolve their issues, suggest they show some respect for each other at Grange meetings and events for the Good of the Order. If they are Sixth Degree members, remind them of the words in the Obligation at the altar that they pledged during that degree.

Conclusion. One of the most important moments of the resolution meeting is at the conclusion. Whether you resolve the case or not, it is important to thank the people for their time in a friendly manner and change the topic as if a meeting never happened, wishing them and their Grange well. Offer your services for a later time, if necessary. Be positive, friendly, and considerate.

Report the results of the meeting with the State Master. The meeting and the results are NOT to be shared with inquiring minds. This meeting should be deemed confidential as backlash and mistrust could happen if information is spread by you outside of the parties involved. Trust is important for those who have entrusted you to solve the problem to rely on your fidelity.

QUESTIONS