

Handling Differences of Opinion Leadership Tip of the Month - Ed Kruse, HealthierChurch.org April 2016

Many meetings waste time when a difference of opinion bogs down the discussion, and sometimes results in unnecessary damage to relationships. What if there were a way to address differences of opinion in seconds, and in a healthier way? Equally important, would the difference of opinion be addressed regardless of whether it was something major or something trivial?

1. Qualify what kind of difference is it - Is it an "either-or" continuum, paradox, or polarity? Each requires a different response: a) Choose neither end of the continuum; b) Embrace both ends of the paradox. Alternate each end of the polarity. (#2 of Ed's top 10)
2. Discover what kind of fact it seems to be, Is it true for you as analytical, emotive, synthetic, or belief? (#3 of Ed's top 10)
3. Pick the approach you prefer at this moment - Confront, Avoid, or Postpone! Ask yourself, "How do I want to respond?" a) Confront (act like someone who is not kind, argue, beat up, threaten, be stubborn, fight), b) Avoid (walk away from the conversation, give up, ignore, stay silent), or c) Postpone (Give it a rest, think about it, delay, "later," cool off, count to 10?) (#4 of Ed's top 10)
4. Set guidelines for the conversation that the group adopts by consensus just before the conversation begins. (#5 of Ed's top 10)



5. Reframe the issue or its context - such as in Adventures in Attitudes - the anxiety filled driver who was angry at the boy who threw a rock at his new car on a rural road only to find out the boy was trying to get his attention because his mother lay dying in the ditch. (#6 of Ed's top 10)
6. Offer a Bible study on Galatians 6:2-5 (NIV) "Carry each other's burdens...Each should carry his own load."
7. Take a smaller portion - borrowed from the Meltdown Challenge for how much you want to eat, or how to eat an elephant by cutting it into bite-sized pieces.
8. Discover if there is a difference in context - Does it depend on who it is, how old they are, what their story is, or what their experience might be?
9. Enlist someone to intervene - (passively) Sending you a pre-set signal, in a pre-agreed way, such as when I ask my wife to give me the "cutoff" signal when I am talking too long. (#7 of Ed's top 10)
10. Learn simple responses to opinions - a) Start with a compliment? b) Start with evidence that you listened? Or c) "I understand what I think the speaker said and I feel..." (the opposite, or differently). (#8 of Ed's top 10)
11. Take the blame and apologize - such as Scott Marcum suggested. You could say, "I owe you an apology." Friend: "What for?" You: "I had some bad thoughts and attitudes against you and I apologize; please forgive me." (#9 of Ed's top 10)
12. Just start singing, or even humming.
13. Objectify the behavior rather than the person - no labels, character assassination, defamation, or slander.
14. Shift from either-or to multiple-choice - (Brainstorm forced choice fight or flight - Is there no "pause button"? Are there different functions of the brain for different types of truths?)
15. Laugh it off - Richard Carlson in the book *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*.



16. Express the greater value before you respond.
17. Don't worship loudness, logic, or consistency. Don't even respond to these.
18. Create a scenario or an exercise, such as, If you were a candidate for president and someone called you a name, what would you do? How would you respond?
19. Ask questions - What if you ask the wrong question? You'll find out sooner. Just ask a different one. (#10 of Ed's top 10.)
20. Make your own menu - it's fun to pick from your own list (#10 of Ed's top 10. OK, so that's #11)
21. "I feel I can somewhat understand how you do; I felt that way too at one time; and I found that... (commonly called Feel, Felt, Found)
22. Pray while you are listening to the other person. (#1 of Ed's top 10)

As a gentle way of disagreeing, try one or more of these tips at your next congregation or council meeting, at home, or when you are listening to a public speaker .

For a more in depth discussion on this excellent resource for Congregation Leadership Development, request a webinar by the same name at mail@HealthierChurch.org

Bonus: This month's three tips are 10 tips:

[Three \(Plus\) Important Tips for Church Leaders April 2016](#)

Next Month: "Right and Wrong Ways to Delegate"



If you have any questions about this topic, please contact me.

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