



Local Non-profit Helps Businesses Avoid Conflicts that Can Bring a Company to its Knees: Conflict Center of Santa Cruz County Offers Workshops and On-Site Training for Effective Conflict Management

Soquel, CA – August 30, 2005 – Workplace conflict can have a very damaging effect on organizations, and in particular on small businesses who rely on the close working relationships of a small number of people. When a quiet feud erupts between two highly skilled workers in a small business where work is deadline-driven and everyone works interdependently, other workers feel that they have to choose sides, and then everyone feels as if they are walking on egg shells. Morale, motivation and productivity plummet as a result. To help businesses avoid such problems, the Conflict Resolution Center of Santa Cruz County is offering a series of workshops to teach owners, managers and employees to proactively deal with conflict before it becomes a problem.

Conflict in the workplace is a time-consuming and frustrating experience for management as well as the employees. Up to 40% of a manager's time may be spent dealing with conflict. (Watson, C and Hoffman, R (1996) "Managers as Negotiators," *Leadership Quarterly* 7 (1) 1996). When conflict escalates to legal action, it can also be very expensive. Even when the employer prevails on a dispute case, it costs an average of \$50,000 or more in attorney's fees, in addition to the organizations time and resources. (McDermott, E with Berkeley, A (1996) "Alternative Dispute Resolution in the Workplace: Concepts and Techniques for Human Resource Executives and their Counsel." Quorum Books, p. xviii.) Conflict can also lead to high employee turnover, which is a big expense for a small business. The turnover costs for an employee is anywhere between 75% and 150% of the annual salary. (Phillips, D.T. (1990) "The Price Tag of Turnover." *Personnel Journal*, Dec. 1990, p. 58.)

Companies are increasingly turning to conflict resolution techniques and work-place mediation to resolve employee conflict. "Workplace conflict is inevitable, but it can be put to positive use," said Nancy Heischman, Executive Director of the non-profit Conflict Resolution Center of Santa Cruz County (CRC). Since 1986, the Soquel-based CRC has helped thousands of organizations and individuals to find satisfying solutions to challenging problems through skills training and mediation services. CRC's programs address conflict at all stages -- from prevention to intervention, in workplaces, homes, neighborhoods and courts. Through respectful dialogue, participants are able to create their own mutually satisfying solutions. In addition to offering businesses a choice of public workshops or on-site workshops tailored for their specific business needs, CRC offers mediation services -- a facilitated dialogue between individual employees or teams which promotes respectful communication and cooperative problem solving. CRC's skilled and experienced mediators guide employees forward in each phase of the mediation process: identifying problems, clarifying perspectives and concerns, developing viable options and reaching inclusive and mutually satisfying agreements.

CRC also provides two services in partnership with the County of Santa Cruz. The Small Claims Mediation Program provides mediation of small claims lawsuits on site at the main courthouse. The Victim-Offender Dialogue Program facilitates meetings between juvenile offenders and the victims of their crimes. Through dialogue and realistic restitution plans, this program seeks to repair both physical and emotional damage.

Local Companies Learn to Instill a Process and Culture that Minimizes Conflict

Big Creek Lumber asked CRC to hold a Conflict Management Tools & Skills workshop at their Watsonville facility as part of a company-wide employee enrichment program. “We saw the training as an opportunity for our employees to learn important life skills, and also as a preventative measure to avoid serious problems. As a result of the CRC training, employees learned practical solutions to real life issues that inevitably arise in the workplace,” said Dave Renkens, CFO, Big Creek Lumber. “One of the key benefits of the training was that it took away the fear that employees felt when facing conflict, and gave them the necessary skills and confidence to proactively deal with the issue. Employees learned that they were capable of creating a solution on their own that would work for both parties. These new skills will help our employees be more successful at work and in their personal lives.”

Soquel business owner Karen Calcagno, President of Calcagno Properties and Advantage Coaching and Family Business Center, said, “CRC has helped me in two very significant ways. I have been able to create a more peaceful and productive workplace as a result of taking CRC’s mediation training along with my managers. And I have also arranged mediation services for some of my tenants. In one case, a conflict over noise in a condo escalated to the point where one tenant was requesting a restraining order on the other. CRC’s mediation resulted in an incredible transformation -- not only did the two tenants work out an agreeable solution, they became close personal friends. I strongly recommend CRC to every business owner.”

Small Business Workshops

Businesses interested in registering individuals for one of CRC’s workshops can get details at www.crcsantacruz.org or by calling 831-475-6117. Workshops are repeated once a quarter with open registration, or can be held at the work site.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TOOLS & SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE, a one-day workshop will be held Friday, September 16 and Friday, December 2, from 9 am to 5 pm in Santa Cruz. The cost of attending is \$85 per person (or call for group rates).

This interactive workshop will enable employees to gain insight into the dynamics of conflict and develop skills to solve conflicts with coworkers (and clients) on their own. Attendees will gain insight into others’ points of view and the underlying causes of the conflict, learn to listen to others without getting defensive and speak to others without making them defensive, keep conflicts from escalating and overall, find common ground and mutually satisfying solutions.

MEDIATION SKILLS FOR BUSINESS OWNERS AND SUPERVISORS, is a one-day workshop that will be held Friday, October 21 from 9 am to 5 pm, in Capitola. The cost of attending is \$85 per person (or call for group rates).

This interactive workshop will give supervisors the skills they need to facilitate communication and problem solving between employees in conflict. Business owners and supervisors will learn to: intervene early and contain the problem, help employees in conflict identify the problem, support employees' choice of the best approach to resolution, better manage the dual role of supervisor and mediator, facilitate productive discussion and lasting resolution and provide effective follow-up and support to employees.

More information about the Conflict Resolution Center of Santa Cruz County is available at www.crcsantacruz.org or by calling 831-475-6117.