

## Calming Conflicts

By Lain Ehmann

Whether you're dealing with a litigious customer, an unresponsive employee or a manufacturing department plagued with delays, when conflicts arise in the sales manager's life there's only one way to handle them: confront the offender and blast them into submission, right?

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Actually, confrontation is only one of several options for dealing with conflict, says Howard Guttman, principal of Guttman Development Strategies, Inc. in northern New Jersey and author of *When Goliaths Clash: Managing Executive Conflict to Build a More Dynamic Organization* (AMACOM, 2003). Confrontation doesn't necessarily mean bashing your opponent over the head until they give in, says Guttman. Instead he says there are four main ways to deal with conflict, some of which are more effective than others.

- 1. Play the victim.** Do nothing, act powerless and complain about your miserable lot in life.
- 2. Leave the scene.** Physically remove yourself from involvement in a conflict.
- 3. Change yourself.** Change your perception of the other party or the situation or "let it go," says Guttman.
- 4. Confront the issue.** Address the matter, not aggressively as many salespeople are be inclined to do, but openly, candidly and objectively, all the while trying to communicate with the other party.

On smaller issues, the most effective approach might be to just let the conflict go or to remove yourself from the situation. On larger issues, confrontation might be the way to go. Here are Guttman's tips for engaging in constructive confrontation.

- **Keep in mind that your goal is to enroll someone.** If you send an implicit message that all you care about is winning, don't be surprised if the other party doesn't bend over backwards to give you what you want.
- **Welcome resistance.** "We talk about overcoming resistance like it's a bad thing," says Guttman. "But it's actually a good thing." Resistance is like a compass reading that tells you where the other person is coming from.
- **Think in terms of the organization or partnership, not just in terms of yourself.** "Many times people think of their own patch, their own silo in an organization," says Guttman. Instead, individuals must think horizontally and take a team approach, whether working with another department, an employee or a customer.
- **Business needs must supersede functional needs.** Sometimes you must lose so the organization or the relationship can win. Know what's most important in the long run.
- **Remember that one of a manager's key tasks is to lead.** Leadership means motivating people to follow you, not forcing them to do so. If you're always using your heavy hand to get your way, others will check out, says Guttman.

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