



5

Steps to

CAPITALIZING

on

Conflict!

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5 Steps to Capitalizing on Conflict by Dr. Jessica Brown

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If you've been in a church for more than a day or so, you've probably experienced **some conflict**. For some, this can be a deterrent. For leaders, it can feel like people are against you or not on board with your vision.

Let's be honest, conflict can be frustrating when we don't know how to manage it! But the reality is that wherever there are people, there will be conflict. And guess what, **conflict does not have to be a bad thing!** In fact, conflict can be good. It means that people are engaged in your community and they care about what is going on.

So, for the sake of your organization, **you DO NOT want to get rid of conflict!** I want to provide you 5 quick steps for capitalizing on conflict in your organization to make the most of the energy in your community.

Step #1

Highlight the Energy

Conflict is not the worst thing that can happen to your community or organization. **Apathy is.** If people are invested enough to even be in conflict about something, it means that they have some passion about what is going on.

As a leader, this is a good sign! Highlight the energy that people demonstrate when they choose conflict. Reframe what you might see as “negative” words or behaviors, as people showing you how important this organization is to them.

This can be important for you to remember as a leader, and is helpful to say aloud for the whole group. A comment such as ***“I see this is something that we all really care about! Let’s take a moment to hear each other out so we can get on the same page”*** can go a long way.



Step #2

Honor Individual Perspectives

Many of our traditional strategies for managing conflict have the effect of shutting people down, because our immediate response is often to try to cool down high emotions. While it can definitely be helpful to give people time to calm down before a meaningful discussion can happen, it's **critically important** that we don't have ONLY the cool off period without actually giving people a chance to talk.

Set aside some time to have people say what is they are concerned about. If emotions are very high, you may need to set some ground rules for how this conversation will go. Either way, it is important that people feel that their perspectives matter. **Don't skip this step!**



Step #3

Focus on Points of Connection

As a leader, one of the best skills you can have during moments of conflict is to be a **good listener**. As people share their perspectives and concerns, look for points of connection.

What are the ways that the people in conflict actually seem to be saying that the same or similar things are important to them?

Point out the ways that people might agree, or at least have the same desires as a **starting point** for managing the conflict.

Step #4

Come to a Consensus

After pointing out common ground, see if the group can find a way to focus on the **common ground**.

Are there values or hopes that the group can start with?

Consensus requires that everyone's opinion is heard and considered, but not that every one gets their way.

Note that some people might not be happy with everything that is decided, but if they can **connect to a value represented**, it might be easier to take a disappointment.

Step #5

Decide on a Plan of Action

Turn passion into action!

Help people to transfer the energy they had for the conflict into the actions that will help to solve the problem. If someone felt very passionately about one “side” of an argument, have them take action in a way that helps them to use that energy to move closer to something important to them.



Does your organization need help?

My name is Dr. Jessica Brown and I empower organizations of faith to make choices for wellness through therapy, education, and consultation.

Dr. Jessica Young Brown is a counseling psychologist who serves as Assistant Professor of Counseling and Practical Theology at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. In this capacity she teaches and provides consultation and program development on issues of vocation, spiritual formation, and human development.

Dr. Brown is also a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Certified Clinical Trauma Professional in private practice, and provides education and consultation to churches and community organizations on mental health and organizational issues. In her clinical practice, Dr. Brown focuses on women's issues and relational concerns.

**Schedule your initial consultation
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