



**Strengthening Oklahoma's Safety Net,
One Community At A Time**

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Resolution for the New Year

As we approach the coming new year, most of us start thinking about resolutions for improved performance. Most resolutions center around weight loss or stopping bad habits. While the making of these resolutions usually winds up being an empty annual ritual, there is a type of resolution that must be effectively dealt with on a daily basis. As long as we have human interaction, there will be conflict. That is as certain as death and taxes. Board members must learn and practice healthy conflict resolution, which is defined as bringing issues to a *successful* conclusion.

Good Communication

Before boards can engage in healthy conflict resolution, each member must first learn how to listen by understanding and using the following proven communication skills.

- Don't be a 'mind reader' - find out what the person is really thinking or feeling
- Don't rehearse your responses when someone else is talking - by practicing your 'comeback' instead of listening, you miss the core of their message
- Don't use 'selective hearing' by filtering information and taking in only what you want to hear
- Don't drift off when someone is talking to you or derail others by changing the subject - shows lack of interest and respect for what others have to say
- If you must identify everything you hear to your own experience, you probably aren't hearing what others are saying (e.g., 'that reminds me of when I...') - the focus shifts from others to 'I' and crushes communication
- Don't get sidetracked by assessing the messenger instead of the message
- Don't 'spar' with others by belittling and discounting what they say - damages relationships and can bring down health centers
- Don't agree just because you think that is 'being nice' - it does not resolve the conflict and does not make you a good listener

Healthy Conflict Resolution

Board members are chosen because their individual viewpoints and expertise add value to the board. The challenge is to find ways to mesh personal views with the goals of the entire board in a way that is most productive for achieving the health center mission. There will be times when things go the way you think best and times when they do not. To accomplish healthy conflict resolution, boards must heed the following:

- Ask board members who disagree to sum up one another's comments to see if they really understand each other
- Work on compromise by getting to the source of the conflict; then engage in 'give and take' until a solution is reached
- Ask each side to write out their concerns/questions as the answers could lead to a compromise
- Board members, as humans, will be wrong at times and must know that changing a position shows character strength - not weakness
- Pick your battles - do not make mountains out of mole hills; stay focused on issues that really matter

In 2005, may all board members resolve to engage in effective communication and healthy conflict resolution so that health centers can better serve their communities.

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