Resolving Conflicts In Your Club

First in a series

How can your club members work smoothly together, drawing strength from a variety of personalities and priorities?

When groups work together there are two separate issues involved. First is the *task* (the actual job being done) and second is the *process* (the way the group acts as a unit.) Clubs who focus solely on getting the job done and neglect the group process, may find themselves able to do less and less. *These are clubs marked by frustration.*

Clubs who pay attention to their *process* can find themselves having successes they never thought possible. *These are clubs known for their spirit of cooperation and a high level of fellowship and goodwill.*

While some groups must struggle with formation and structure, Ruritan clubs should not be facing that problem. By constitution and design, clubs have distinct officers with specific duties and service committees that allow for smooth organization and function.

However, once the officers are elected and the committees appointed, most clubs must face a few obstacles in the road to performance. The group process is important. We accomplish more working on a common project than we could ever do as individuals. With a group we can combine talents, experience, and skills for the best possible outcome.

But with every group, comes a set of challenges. Consider these group characteristics and suggestions:

The Mouse: This is the quiet member in the corner who doesn't say much. He or she may be the most under-utilized person in your club. If **you** are the mouse – it is your responsibility to speak up and share your ideas. If your club has a mouse – try drawing him or her out, encouraging interaction in group discussion and performance.

The Loud-Mouth: Here's another character who shows up in most groups. Is there someone in your club whose opinions form a disproportionate share of the discussion. Consider for a moment if the loud-mouth could be **you**. If the loud-mouth is someone else, ask him or her to summarize briefly and ask others for their views.

Written Record: Consider using an easel with a flip chart or a dry erase board so that decisions made during a meeting can be recorded boldly in front of everyone. This avoids conflict when the minutes of the meeting later reflect something not everyone realized was happening.

Feedback: Club presidents and committee chairs should ask for feedback frequently, even on small issues. Everyone offering a criticism should be prepared to offer a suggestion for improvement.

Handling Failure and Deadlock: Ultimately the long-term success of your club will depend upon how your members handle failure – because you will occasionally fail to accomplish your goals. Any failure should be explored by the group and the club should make an effort to learn from the mistakes. In the case of deadlock – two opposing groups facing off on some proposed action – try to find the common ground and ways to compromise. Most importantly, decide if the issue even needs to be settled. Many a club meeting has been wasted on this kind of debate, when tabling the issue might have served the group better. If the issue is not critical, try something simple, like tossing a coin, provided all parties agree to abide by the outcome.

Sign posting: On your way to a large goal, make sure club members understand what is being done along the way – keeping the big picture in mind.

Avoid single solutions: For every problem, generate a number of alternatives for discussion, then pick one to implement.

Active Communication: This is the responsibility of both the speaker and the listener. The speaker must actively express his or her ideas in a clear, concise manner. This listener must actively seek to understand what has been said and ask for clarification if unsure.

Groups are like any relationships – you have to work at them. With just a little attention to your club's group dynamics you can accomplish work far beyond anything you might imagine.