

## Bill's Building Blocks

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### Is Conflict Good or Bad?

While teaching a class of undergraduates about Sales & Operations Planning, we got into a conversation about conflict resolution. We were discussing a scenario from my past centered on a new hire master scheduler trying to run the monthly S&OP meeting in conflict with the goals of the VP of Finance and the VP of Sales. Both individuals were long-time, senior executives with strong relationships with the CEO. Sales demand had slumped, there was a significant supply problem, and the division was not meeting its financial targets for the quarter. Sound familiar? One of the VPs began to bully the master scheduler about his personal responsibility to fix the supply problem within an impossible timeframe, and a major conflict had ensued in the meeting. As we talked about ways to resolve the conflict, one of the students asked, "Are these techniques industry specific?"

A long time ago someone said, "Conflict is neither good nor bad. It is merely two different ideas trying to occupy the same space at the same time." My analogy is that conflict is like two cars trying to change lanes into the same lane at the same time. The lane change is neither good nor bad, neither right nor wrong.

Conflict resolution is not industry specific, rather it is common to the set of soft skills that every person learns to be successful working with other people. Here are some tips:

- Take emotion out of the conversation. It is easy to fall into the trap of taking implied accusations personally. Separate accusations out from personal responsibility. Take responsibility for doing your assigned job without becoming emotional.
- Turn the conversation into a data driven conversation. State facts and conclusions that can be backed-up with the data. When you can, describe the data in cause and effect factual statements. This is the best defense against emotion.
- Brief your manager before the meeting and expect your managers support during the meeting. Make your manager understand that you know your job and are doing it to the best of your ability. This is particularly important for a new hire.
- Expand the conversation to involve remedies that can be provided by other parties in the meeting who are themselves highly trusted by senior management. Many times, other functional areas have new information that is highly related to the conflict.

Conflict resolution is a learned soft skill that every supply chain professional should have in their toolkit.

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