

# Managing Instead of Avoiding Confrontation

## Confrontation and leadership, Part 1

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If you want to learn a skill, like playing the piano or shooting a basketball, you can't avoid practice. If you want to get in shape, you can't avoid workouts. If you want to grow in your relationship with Christ, you can't avoid prayer. Those are the essentials.

In the same way, if you want to lead with influence, you can't avoid confrontation. I don't mean you need to invite it, but you can't close your eyes to it either. Managing confrontation is an essential of leadership.

Why is that? For one, confrontation is inevitable. Whenever you're dealing with imperfect people, you will have conflict. In fact, any time you get people together with different skills, personalities and backgrounds, those differences will eventually lead to conflict. You can either confront those conflicts and improve your leadership or ignore them and lose your influence.

Many leaders try to avoid conflict as a way to "keep the peace." That's not a good idea. Trying to make everyone happy will leave you with a half-fulfilled vision. But confronting difficult and uncomfortable issues when they arise will strengthen your team and improve your ability to lead.

As a pastor, you will have conflict with your staff, your board, members of your church, and people in your community. When that happens, you need to lean in to the confrontation in a way that honors God and improves your relationships.

**Confront Without Being Confrontational**

Most of us are not wired for confrontation. That may actually be a good thing. Maybe you know someone who thrives on the drama and enjoys debate. They're just itching for a fight. Rather than motivating their followers or persuading their opponents, confrontational people usually just lose their audience.

There is a way to confront without being confrontational. The Bible gives us some clear examples of that. When Peter was in the wrong, Paul says he "opposed him to his face" (Galatians 2:11). Yet they still continued to lead together. And Nathan the prophet got in King David's face about an affair, saying, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7), while also offering a path of repentance and forgiveness.

Jesus never shied away from confronting others, whether it was turning over the money changers' tables in the temple (Matthew 21:12) or calling out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees as "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27). But Jesus was the perfect example of grace to all who believed in Him.

## ***Confronting in a biblical way means doing so with love leading to restoration.***

Your passion for your people will lead you to confront. James, the brother of the Lord, ends his letter with a great example of biblical confrontation (James 5:19-20). Instead of winning a fight, the point is to "bring that person back." Rather than point out sin, confrontation can actually "cover over a multitude of sins."

Each of those examples has one thing in common: love. The purpose of the confrontation was not to hurt another person but to make them better. Confrontational people usually just want to win an argument. Confronting in a biblical way means doing so with love leading to restoration.

### **Dealing With Confrontation on Your Staff**

As a pastor, how and when you confront those you lead directly says a lot about your ability to lead effectively. In fact, it may be the biggest determining factor in how committed people will be to your vision. If you confront the right way, your team will respect you and want to stick with you to the end. Confront the wrong way, or avoid it altogether, and they may check out.

There are times when you will personally have to step in and confront a staff member. One area is performance. Maybe a staff member isn't giving enough effort. Perhaps he or she is failing to meet expectations. The worst thing you can do is say nothing and allow that person to continue thinking the current level of work is adequate.

Another reason to confront is when someone is stirring up strife. There is no excuse for creating conflict and division on a team. If you see this or any other obvious sin, it's time to step in.

Don't ignore the issue. Embrace the confrontation as a positive. Some friction and tension on a team can be good. It lets everyone know where they stand and gives them incentive to work hard. It can also encourage growth.

We must handle and manage conflict in the right way. Many other leaders have given their rules of confrontation on staff, including John Maxwell and Andy Stanley. Here are a few of mine:

*Always confront personally.* Unless absolutely unavoidable, never confront in front of a crowd. Do it one-on-one, in person. Never send someone else to do your confronting for you.

*Always confront quickly.* Handle the little fires as soon as possible before they become big fires. And don't allow the confrontation to linger. Never let it hang over that person's head for days and days. Get to it, and then get it over with.

*Always confront in love.* Never confront someone out of anger. Make sure your heart and mind are right before you get into the meeting. Don't let your emotions lead the discussion.

*Always assume the best.* Assume that staff person who made a mistake had the best intentions in mind. Open the conversation with questions. Ask the person to explain before leveling any charges. You may think you have enough information and have already resolved the conflict in your own mind before having the talk. But maybe you only have part of the picture.

There are other areas of potential conflict you will need to confront in your ministry. Next week, we'll look at how to confront your board. And after that, we'll tackle the more difficult problem of confrontation among your members.

Confrontation is seldom easy. For most of us, it doesn't come naturally. But it's unavoidable. Knowing how to confront the right way is indispensable for leaders of influence.

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