

Conflict Management Guidance for Coaches

Whilst it is rare that the Regional Coach and their team will be involved in resolving conflict within branches it does happen. The Regional Coach or their representative can be called upon, by HQ or the branch, to act as an arbitrator to resolve disagreement therefore it is appropriate that some training is given.

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1. Conflict management approach

As illustrated in the diagram below, the majority of issues can be avoided by adhering to established policies (AVOID issues). Branches should run by reference to the Branch Officers Handbook which outlines policies for branch, diving and training management. The DO Workshop makes extensive use of this handbook to educate DOs and other Committee members on best practice. All that may be required to resolve a branch dispute is to refer the members to the relevant policy in the handbook.

However, all policies have consequences and the written word is frequently argued over (that's the legal profession) so despite robust policies disputes will still occur. Given that disputes will occur prior to the coach being asked in, it is likely that others will have attempted to resolve the issue and presumably have failed, with the resulting polarisation of views, before the regional team becomes involved (TRAP issues).

Thus, the disputes you get involved with, whilst small in number, will most likely be significant, if only to those involved (MITIGATE issues).



It is important to remember that we all perceive incidents in different ways. This can be for various reasons:

- Personality.
- Resilience.
- Background.
- Culture.
- Stress levels.

2. Understanding the issue

Because of the nature of the conflict the regional coach will be asked to resolve (entrenched views), this role will need to be facilitative which will involve listening and focusing on issues only.

There are several points worth remembering:

- You will be the first point of contact with BSAC. You have prescribed authority unless you 'blow it'.
- You need to focus on the issues only, not your personal views.
- Members may well have a full 'capacity bucket' when you meet them.
- People cannot think when they are angry so asking questions may not help.
- Allow them the 'first rush' to get it 'off their chest'.
- Try de-escalation techniques e.g. remain calm, sit at their level, sit beside them, keep open body language (unfolded arms), smile and nod to show you understand but do not agree with them at this time.
- Remember if you are not getting anywhere a 'change of face' can be powerful.
- Ask them for a solution so you can seek common ground.
- Summarise what they have said so you show you have understood the key points.
- Any 'tool' can go either way. No template solution.

3. The capacity bucket

The concept of the capacity bucket is important to grasp. The concept involves understanding that humans can only take so much going on in their lives. Their ability to cope is limited. This capacity will vary from person to person and day to day. When the bucket is full humans get overloaded and cannot manage. Anger, irritability, stress, inability to consider others are all symptoms of individuals with full capacity buckets. Many things in life add to our buckets such as:

- Tiredness.
- Financial worries.
- Family or domestic issues.
- Illness
- Bereavement.
- Work worries.
- Too many tasks.

Diving as a sport does much to relieve the stresses of everyday life, it is one of the reasons we enjoy our sport but it must be remembered that our members bring to club activities all the issues that are going on in their lives.

Understanding and finding out if anything else is going on is a very important first step to resolving an issue. There is little point trying to get a member to pay for an expedition space if they have just lost their job!

4. Resolution

Once you have spoken with the different parties you will need to look for a solution. To help with this the following model may help:

- D. Diagnose the problem. List the issues.
- O. Options, list what options are available.
- D. Decide. Compare the issues against the options. The option that solves the most issues is likely to be the compromised solution.
- A. Assign tasks based on the decision. Members may have to act to get the solution e.g. change behaviour, apologise, accept re-training, put a policy in place etc.
- R. Review the process and the decision. Ask if its working, is the problem over and tell someone what has been agreed.

There will be 4 levels of conflict resolution:

- Level 1: dispute resolved with a quiet word.
- Level 2: dispute resolved with reference to the branch committee.
- Level 3: dispute resolved with reference to HQ.
- Level 4: dispute resolved with reference to official agencies e.g. police.

Kindness and understanding can go a long way to resolving issues. Written warnings often 'fuel the fire'. Seeking advice from HQ may reveal more information on individuals which may throw a light on behaviour patterns.

Possible tools for gaining compliance are:

- Withdrawing access to club facilities for a period of time e.g. boats.
- Refusal of membership.
- Letter from HQ if serious breach of policy.
- Refusal of BSAC membership.