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Managing Conflicts in Any Situation

By: Andrew Sullivan, CEO Mazzitti & Sullivan



I think we all have had the experience of the coworker in your face, yelling at you, the tension so thick in your department you can "cut it with a knife," or the lack of communication that leads to duplication and lost productivity. These descriptions are just a sample of the conflicts we are faced with every day in our work life.

Conflict has two faces. On one side, conflict can actually be good when people do the following:

- Talk about their interests regarding the conflict,
- Develop understanding and empathy,
- Learn that there are many ways of how people view conflict.

When we are able to accept and utilize these skills, resolving conflict can lead to:

- Making a system better
- Producing innovative ideas
- Fostering teamwork and unity
- A positive behavior change

Conflict is bad when it continues without resolution or is ignored. We have all been in a situation where there is 600 pounds of elephant "doo doo" in the room, but no one wants to recognize it. This can result in the following behaviors or patterns:

- Accusations and threats
- One small problem becomes ten problems
- Specific problems become a general blanket of negativity
- Sabotage in the workplace
- Whole departments or cliques form conflicted groups

When we see these negative conflict issues forming at work or in our private lives, people tend to give up, give in, or ignore the situation which only drives the issue more underground.

People feel more stressed about coming into work or going into the conflicted situation. Absenteeism occurs and productivity is lost. People struggle with fear and hostility.

Peoples' reactions to conflict result from both their family experiences and their innate personality. Understanding our conflict management style can help us learn where our "areas of need" are and lead us to change our behaviors in conflict situations.

Simply put, we may not learn to like conflict, but we can learn how to manage it better. Researchers have determined that there are five styles of conflict management that people exhibit at one time or another:

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Ideas for You

INTEGRATING NEW HIRES

Staring a new job can be stressful for even the most put-together professional. Welcome new employees to your organization with these practices:

- **Ask questions.** Show interest in their personal lives - without prying - and put new employees at ease. That also gives them an opportunity to answer questions, instead of always being the one who asks them.
- **Show them the office.** Conduct a personal tour, making introductions and explaining who does what.
- **Invite them to meetings.** They will learn more about the organization and its clients.

TOP TIPS FOR THIS ISSUE

- **Understand more** by asking questions. Don't assume or pretend that you understand. When you ask questions, you learn more and show people that you value their expertise and opinions.
- **Confirm commitments** before you adjourn a meeting. Ask every participant "What are you going to do and by when?" Press for specific dates, not just "next week."

What's Inside

President's Message, Legislative Update, AAP People, Upcoming Confererences

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President's Message

The state of Pennsylvania and Dauphin County in particular have been visited by a number of disasters over the last few months -- a powerful hurricane, historic flooding and record rainfall. Just throw in some locust and then I'll really be concerned!

If the last few months have shown me anything it's been the resilience of so many people in the face of life changing events and the professionalism and dedication of my staff in dealing with our citizens in these trying times.

I am reminded that we all can make a difference in the lives of others whether it's going out and doing damage assessment, answer taxpayer questions over the phone or listening as homeowners make their case during appeals period.

I am proud of the professionals in each and every assessment office in this state. We all do a great job and deserve respect for what we do. To that end, I encourage each of you to make every effort to attend AAP Conferences – the Annual Conference in May and the Fall Conference in November. We offer a wide-range of topics to help you do your job better. I know we're all tightening our belt and trying to save money but there is no substitute for good education and networking with your peers.

I also encourage you to get involved in AAP at both the chapter and the state level. Being involved in your chapter and AAP is one way of getting to know your fellow assessors and making a difference. I look at the AAP Assessment Law Committee that was responsible for the passage of the Act 93, the Consolidated County Assessment Law, as one example.

I look forward to seeing more of all of you in the future.

Steve



Legislative Update

By Jonathan B. Schuck, Chair
Government Information Committee and
Assistant Director of Assessment/Tax Claim, Chester County

Greetings fellow assessment professionals throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Wishing all of you a bountiful fall season and a full helping of professional, college and/or high school football. Since the commencement of the current session in January, the following assessment-related legislation has been introduced: 23 House bills, four House resolutions and 18 Senate bills. Of these 45 pieces of legislation, House Bill 143 was enacted July 11 as Act 34 of 2011. Following are a few highlights for your perusal:

ACT 34 / HOUSE BILL 143

Similar to Senate Bill 301, this act allows the owner of a preferentially assessed parcel to lease or otherwise devote land to small non-coal surface mining. Rollback taxes are imposed only on the portion of land devoted to non-coal surface mining

HOUSE BILL 1696

Similar to House Bill 166, this bill would forbid local taxing authorities from undertaking a court ordered county-wide reassessment for property taxes until a) the General Assembly has enacted legislation to foster uniformity and protect property owners from large increases or b) November 30, 2012. Presented to the Governor on June 30 and subsequently vetoed July 8.

HOUSE RESOLUTION 343

This resolution establishes a task force to develop a set of uniform standards for county reassessment including contracting, standards for disclosing the county's system of property valuation and assessment, a self-evaluation tool for counties to determine when a reassessment is warranted and to recommend a standard to be used for a statewide mandatory reassessment time frame. The resolution was adopted 199-0 on June 27.

HOUSE RESOLUTION 344

This resolution establishes a task force to develop criteria and procedures for

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Article submissions are welcome.
Please send to:
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Managing Conflicts in Any Situation

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- **Avoidance**—they are non-confrontational and worried that conflict will damage relationships
- **Accommodating**—they are agreeable, non assertive, and cooperate at the risk of their own needs
- **Competitive**—they believe in survival of the fittest, and have a must win attitude. They are not flexible
- **Compromising**—the give and get attitude.
- **Collaborative**—both parties work to meet the goals and needs of each

No style is right or wrong, but each style has its consequences. If I avoid conflict, conflict may be prolonged. If I "have to win," low morale and loss of team work can occur. Collaboration may take more time, but results may be most positive for all involved. Regardless of your style of conflict management the following are important communication skills:

- Ask both sides to describe the issues as they see it. Use "I" statements. Don't use "you" or blaming statements
- Listen. Don't interrupt. Listen completely without forming a statement in your own head
- Ask clarifying questions. "Am I hearing you say. . .?"
- Stay in the present. Work on present issues not something from 1972
- Look for areas of agreement. "We both agree on this. Can we build on it?"
- Watch for escalation. If the situation gets heated, take a break then come back to the issues
- If you are asking someone to change, be specific to the BEHAVIOR

  Make sure you don't try to change a person's feelings or attitude

Finally, if conflict has reached a point where people are not talking to each other without the problem escalating each time, a professional mediator or consultant may be needed. Although we may be uncomfortable with mediation services, the outcome can be very helpful.

JOIN THE AAP LIST SERVE

The AAP list serve is an electronic, web-based service to members where they can ask questions and exchange ideas and information with other members from all across the state. List serve membership is limited to active members only. You must have an e-mail account to participate.

When assessors join AAP, they are invited to join the list serve. If you are already an AAP member and are not a member of the list serve, please contact Lori Lawyer at *llawyer@pacounties.org* and she will send you an invitation to join.





AAP People

CHAPTER NEWS

South Central Chapter

The South Central Chapter's next meeting will be held Friday, December 2nd at the Adams County Agricultural Resource Center, and the topic will be "Damage Assessment Pertaining to a National Disaster." Anyone from another chapter who wishes to attend should contact either Anne Teal in Perry County at *ateal@perryco.org*, or Bonnie Mahoney in Cumberland County at *bmahoney@ccpa.net* before November 18th.

The South Central Chapter meets quarterly. Meetings are quarterly - March, June, September and December, beginning with a business meetings at 9 a.m. with seminars beginning immediately after the meeting and are held at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, 670 Old Harrisburg Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

COUNTY NEWS

Lancaster County

Congratulations to Appraiser, **Michael MacPherson**, Lancaster County's newest CPE and welcome to the County's newest appraiser, **John Tierney**.

Lehigh County

Buddy Unger won the first prize at the Great Allentown Fair for his blueberry jelly.

Perry County

Congratulations to **Terry Clouse**, CPE, Chief Field Assessor for Perry County who retired on July 15, 2011 after 16 years of service. Terry looks forward to retirement and spending more time with his grandchildren. We wish Terry good luck in retirement.

Congratulations to **Donna Buckley**, Perry County's newest CPE!

STEB NEWS

Congratulations to **Renee Reynolds** who was appointed Director of the State Tax Equalization Board on June 6, 2011.

SEND US YOUR NEWS!

- Let us know what is happening in your County.
- Share information about your peers.
- Send us notices about job changes, promotions, awards,etc.

The next deadline is **December 5**. Please send your news to: **Terry Cochran** at *tcochran@pacounties.org*.

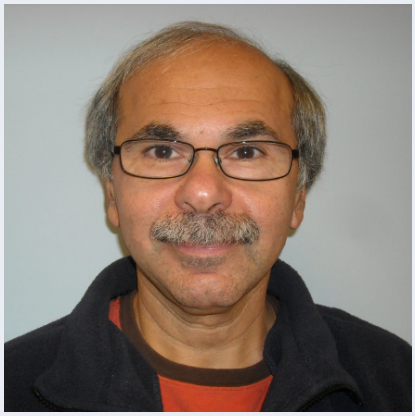
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Anthony "Tony" Alu
Director of Assesments
Luzerne County

Year in assessment field: Eleven

Family: Married to Linda, with a daughter, Christine, son, John, one grandson, Ryan, and expecting two more grandchildren.

What irritates me most in the assessment business: Tax assessment is a noble and complicated profession. It irritates me when people don't give us the respect we deserve.

Most people would be surprised to know: I have a black belt in Karate.

Biggest challenge as an assessor: Representing management to staff and staff to management.

First Job: I cleaned retail stores in Pittston after school.

If I couldn't be an assessor, I'd be: A physical trainer.

If I won millions in the lottery, I would: Set up education funds for my grandchildren.

Favorite vacation: Cruise to the Caribbean.

Favorite food and drink: Pizza topped with shrimp and peppers and a cold beer.

Favorite movie: The Godfather

Three people living or dead that I would invite to dinner: My grandparents.

The hardest lesson I ever learned as an assessor was the time: My car was vandalized during reassessment. Always use a county-owned vehicle when attending public reassessment meetings. It will save you money in vandalism costs.

If I could live in the past for one day, I would change: Nothing. My life has been blessed.

My best friend: My wife, Linda.

AAP
ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

MEMBERABILIA

Legislative Update continued from page 3

data submission, verification and collection to address insufficient sample data and/or to assure and disclose that the sample data relied on to develop a county's performance measure during a reassessment is representative of the bulk of the county's property inventory. This resolution was adopted 199-0 on June 27.

SENATE BILL 704

This bill would expand the State Tax Equalization Board (STEB) from three to five members, of whom three would be "public members." The remaining two members would be the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Revenue or their designees.

The Governor will designate one of the "public" members as chairman. It also adds "school district" to entities that may object or appeal the determinations of the Board to the Commonwealth Court. It also mandates that a common level ratio change of ten percent or more will trigger a review of the findings prior to the certification of the ratio. This bill passed 50-0 in the House on June 13 and was referred to the House Finance Committee June 14.

SPECIAL CCAP/AAP APPOINTMENTS TO HR 343 AND 344 COMMITTEES

Both the CCAP and AAP have been asked to provide representatives to serve on both of these committees. The representatives will be:

- Joan Righter Price, Esquire, Montgomery County Board of Assessment
- Randy Waggoner, CPE, Chief Assessor Perry County
- James Hercik, CPE, Chief Assessor, Fayette County
- Charles "JR" Hardester, CPE, Director of Assessment, Lawrence County

AAP Calendar

Conferences and Meetings

2011

November 17 to 18 - Fall Conference* Holiday Inn Harrisburg/Hershey

2012

January 20 - AAP Board of Governors' Meeting, CCAP North Office, Harrisburg

May 9 to 11 - Annual Conference, Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Seven Springs

November 15 to 16 - Fall Conference Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel, State College

* Registration and class details are available on the AAP website, *www.paassessors.org*.



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