Do Male, Female Nurses Handle Conflict Differently?

Conflict in the workplace has become a major issue for organizations. Some consider conflict an unfortunate problem to overcome while others believe it is a catalyst for change and improvement. Conflicts can be viewed as both, depending on how they are perceived and managed.

Most people would agree that men and women generally tend to think differently. Management of conflict is no exception. Multiple studies have shown that the most common methods of conflict management used by female nurses are avoidance and compromise while male nurses more frequently use collaboration and compromise. Because only 5.8 percent of the total U.S. nursing population is male, it seems likely that avoidance is the most universally used conflict management technique for nurses.

Unfortunately, avoidance also is usually the least effective technique to achieve a win-win solution. In fact, it may worsen the situation because ignoring conflict tends to intensify it, at least internally. The definition of avoidance is pretty clear … individuals choose to ignore the conflict issue because they do feel comfortable doing so or they are concerned that addressing their concerns with the other party will only make the discord worse. No one wins in this case.

Compromise does not require much effort, but it is not considered a win-win conclusion either because someone will have to give in. This can cause resentful feelings, which is not a very productive emotion.

Collaboration does take more time and energy, but it has the most positive outcomes for both parties. It is considered a win-win situation because the two parties, with effort, work together to reach a conclusion where both get what they need or want. An important aspect of achieving true collaboration is that both parties need to keep an open mind during their discussions. They will have to give up some control over the issue to find a solution that works for both parties.

Effective conflict management techniques can assist nurses in achieving more successful conflict resolutions. With increased knowledge and effort, successful conflict management techniques can be used by all nurses.

Tips for Managing Conflict in the Workplace

Keep the following tips in mind when a conflict situation arises at work.

- Communicate assertively with your co-worker(s) by:
  - actively listening
  - maintaining eye contact
  - demonstrating respect for the person
  - expressing your feelings honestly and directly
  - identifying what you see as the issue or conflict

- Be conscious of the fact that conflict can be a productive experience.

- Plan your conversation.

- Choose a private place to talk.

- Ensure that the perception of the other party is the same as what you intended to communicate. Restate the conversation if necessary.

References: