How to Manage a Confrontation

1. Prepare yourself in advance. Clearly determine the cause for the confrontation. Are you addressing a performance issue, an unacceptable attitude or perhaps a safety issue? Also determine the purpose or the goal for the confrontation. What do you want the confrontation to achieve? How do you want to be perceived after the confrontation? With these answers in mind, it will be easier to stay on target during the confrontation.

2. Do not procrastinate if a confrontation is necessary. Many leaders try to convince themselves that the problem with work itself out or dissipate if left alone. Putting off what needs to be addressed allows more time for emotions to grow and frustrations to fester. The reality is that bad news does not get better with time.

3. Avoid extreme emotional involvement. Never initiate a confrontation when you are emotionally charged. This is difficult, but that is why preparing yourself in advance is so important.

4. Choose carefully the time and place for the confrontation. Go behind closed doors if possible. Confrontation in front of an audience invites embarrassment and offers undue opportunities for "emotional performances." Consider timing the confrontation at the end of the work day. This gives the other person an easy exit for cooling off and considering the issue.

5. Work to determine the other person's driving needs. Try to evaluate the issue from their vantage point.

6. Willing accept some measure of responsibility for the situation – admit fault if you are to blame in part or in total.

7. Allow the other person time to vent. Remember, you have had the advantage of sorting through your emotions before initiating this confrontation. Give the other person the same opportunity.

8. Zero in on the problem, not the person. Positive confrontation focuses on the problem. Negative confrontation focuses on the person. Frame the conversation in terms of specific expectations for future performance. Encourage feedback regarding alternative solutions or approaches for managing the issue.