

# SURFACE TO SOUL

Live Well | Lead Well | Coach Well

## 7 Tips for Dealing With Church Conflict

### 1 | LET THE ANGRY PERSON KNOW YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THEY ARE UPSET.

The upset person feels like their experience is unique. Be very specific, saying something like: "I understand that you're really angry right now that I missed our appointment." "Oh, wow, you seem really mad that the pastor never called back." "You're upset that I didn't stay for the entire event -- is that it?" It's important to be specific, to hit home the message to the other person that they are truly understood. Keep the focus on the other person's emotions.

### 2 | ASK, "HELP ME UNDERSTAND . . ." AND "HOW DID YOU COME TO THIS CONCLUSION?"

People become angry when they perceive a situation as unfair or wrong. The person being confronted must uncover the angry person's source of anger - forgetting an appointment, breaking a confidence, or taking actions that were perceived as inappropriate. Pay attention to how people choose to interpret the facts by asking questions such as, "What is it that I said or did that caused you to interpret my behavior as too controlling?"

### 3 | FIND OUT WHAT THE UPSET PERSON WANTS FROM YOU.

Ask questions like "What is it you want or need right now?" or "How do you envision the outcome of this in terms of what I could do?". Cut to the chase by saying something like, "So what do you want me to do about it?" Help the person focus on solutions rather than who to blame, saying something similar to, "It's obvious that you're concerned about how we extend hospitality at \_\_\_\_ Church. Would you be willing to compile a list of recommendations for the Board to consider?"

### 4 | OFFER WHAT HELP YOU CAN -- OR SAY CLEARLY WHAT YOU CAN'T DO.

After the person expresses what they want, decide what, if anything, you're able to do, and say so. You may hear that an apology is desired, and if you accept some fault for the situation you may say something like: "I'm sorry, I didn't realize the supplies we used were for your upcoming event. Please accept my apology -- I'll be happy to purchase the supplies you need." Or you may decide that it's not within your power to help. If so, express that clearly: "I wish I could stay longer today to help, but I can't." Sometimes it's within your power to help, but you choose not to - setting a boundary is okay.

### 5 | SET LIMITS ON WHAT YOU'LL TOLERATE.

What this sounds like: "I can see you're angry, but you're taking it out on me -- and if you care about me, you'll stop." It's reasonable to say calmly: "Look, I'm willing to listen, but you have to stop shouting at me." Or, "I can see that you're upset about X. But if you want to talk about it and get my help to resolve it, you have to quit attacking me." Still being berated or screamed at? It's okay to quit the conversation. Walk away if you feel physically threatened. While the other party has a right to feel anger and other emotions, they don't have the right to take it out on others.

### 6 | ACCEPT THAT THE AGGRIEVED PERSON IS DOING THE BEST THEY CAN.

Reframing another person's anger changes the way your brain responds to it. By consciously telling yourself, "It's not my fault they are angry" you will be able to move you beyond your tendency to become defensive.

### 7 | ACCEPT THAT YOU'RE DOING THE BEST YOU CAN, TOO.

Acknowledge your own limitations, saying something like, "I wish I could have stayed with Jack long enough to fix his computer, but I already stayed an hour and I'm late for the dentist appointment." Or "I wish I could help Susan, but there's nothing I can do about her desire to change worship times." Avoid becoming entangled in situations that have little or nothing to do with you or the role you play. Avoid fixing problems that should be addressed by others. Direct the upset person to the appropriate individuals or teams. Make a phone call on the spot to schedule a time for the appropriate parties to meet.



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