PUSHY PARTNERS

Focus: Teamwork, Cooperation, Conflict

Time: 5-10 minutes

Objectives:

1. Acknowledge the existence of conflict
2. Identify ways to handle conflict
3. Brainstorm ways to reduce conflict

Materials needed:

- Watch with timer

Introduction:

Like stress, conflict is inevitable; like stress, it can also be both positive and negative. Positive dynamics of conflict include increased energy and attention. Negative aspects of conflict include resistance and defensiveness. The famed psychologist Kurt Lewin viewed the social environment as a field which impacted in an interactive way with a person’s psychological state and vice versa. Yoda in Star Wars brought this “Field Theory” to the big screen, with his kind exit message, “may the force (field) be with you.” Star Wars fans know that Luke had to influence the force (field) for the force to work with him. This quick exercise illustrates the typical negative dynamics (and force) of conflict.

Directions:

1. Pair up participants and have them stand facing each other. Ask them to raise their hands and place their palms against their partners’.
2. When you call “GO,” they must push against their partners’ hands. Encourage them throughout: “Keep pushing. Push! Just a few seconds longer. That’s it, push!”
3. After 30 seconds to a minute, call time. Thank everyone, and ask them to sit back down.
4. Conduct a discussion utilizing the questions below.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you pushed against your partner’s hands, what did your partner need to do in order to maintain equilibrium?
2. If you pushed harder, what did your partner have to do in response?
3. Think about responding to someone with a different outlook, idea, or opinion from your own. How could you verbally “push” in those situations, making the other person want to push back harder against you? [If no one brings it up, suggest that one way is to contradict the person’s idea].
Quick Training Tips

4. What are some ways you could respond to an opinion you disagree with that wouldn’t result in the other person feeling pushed against? [Help participants to understand that by beginning a discussion with clarifying, neutral questions, rather than statement that oppose the other person’s position, a more positive and sharing dialogue will ensue].

5. Are there any additional benefits to asking questions about an opinion or idea you don’t immediately agree with?

6. How does this knowledge benefit our department? You personally?