Cobb Hill Cohousing
Conflict Transformation CRA
ASSUMPTIONS

Conflicts are unavoidable in human relations. Our approach to them can be one that makes use of conflict as a means of building trust, creating innovative solutions to problems, and strengthening relationships. However, either avoiding conflict or approaching transformation adversarially, will destroy the essence of true community: interdependence based on trust and cooperation. We assume that the practice of gossip and other less productive forms of discussing conflicts and issues within our community will be discouraged. Our intention is to be direct and honest with each other, transforming our issues, concerns and conflicts in a clean and focused way.

PROACTIVE STRATEGY

While we recognize that conflict is inevitable, we can reduce the amount of conflict within the community through the open communication of values and feelings. We will therefore schedule regular meeting times (at least once annually) that specifically create an opportunity for open sharing of values and feelings amongst community members. We encourage members to air conflicts as they arise, both publicly in meetings as well as privately outside of meetings. In this way, there will be a greater level of transparency, tolerance, respect, empathy, and understanding created amongst members, all of which will help transform conflicts at Cobb Hill.

COMMUNITY CONFLICTS AND SMALLER INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS

Often, conflicts that arise in the community will be between two or three people. Most of this document aims to address these types of conflicts. However, sometimes we will experience “group conflict” in which the many members of the community may be involved. For these larger community conflicts, we wish embrace the concepts of conflict transformation imbedded in this document -- and at the same time leave the process for addressing these conflicts more open and contextually appropriate.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES

Conflicts may arise at any time, and there are a variety of strategies available to help work through them -- but for any strategy to work, all parties in the conflict must be committed to the process -- either within a community meeting or outside of a meeting. When conflicts do arise, the following strategies are offered and encouraged to maintain a healthy relationship with each other. The techniques employed in these strategies are detailed below under CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUES.

COMMUNITY VALIDATION

Sometimes it is very valuable to have the community be a part of the Conflict Transformation Process. This approach is generally issue and individual specific, so this document will not prescribe or recommend a specific community component, other than to invite those involved in conflict (especially if third party assistance is utilized) to find a way to use the support of the community in transforming conflicts at Cobb Hill.

1) Unassisted Transformation

The parties involved resolve conflict by practicing CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUES with no outside help.

2) Mediation

It is recommended that the parties in conflict first attempt resolution themselves, seeking third party assistance if resolution is not achieved. When seeking third party assistance, one option is to utilize a mediator from within the community who assists the parties in designing their own solution. We have competent mediators within our community.
3) Professional Assistance

Conflicting parties may choose to seek professional help in mediation and conflict transformation.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUES

Keep in mind Personality Styles.

People come in all different flavors. All kinds of personality profile studies are available that can illuminate these differences, but for our purposes, suffice it to keep in mind that no two people ever share exactly the same perspective on an issue.

Principles vs. Positions

Principles are people's non-quantifiable, fundamental values. They run deep and have duration. For example, maintaining good nutrition.

Positions are measurable and specific to a given situation. They are more negotiable (hopefully). For example, wanting to create a 400 square foot vegetable garden.

ENVIRONMENT FOR TRANSFORMATION

A Safe Place

Find a neutral place that feels safe and comfortable to both of you -- free of stress, anxiety, interruptions, or distractions.

The Right Time and Enough Time

Set up a time for conflict transformation that allows you both time to cool down and prepare (see Personal Preparation below). Also, set aside plenty of time for the transformation session. Don't rush the process.

Someone You Both Can Trust

If you both choose mediation, mutually agree upon a mediator that you trust to be qualified and balanced.

MEDIATOR PREPARATION

As a mediator, you must:

Care about the people involved rather than the issues; yet remain balanced (multi-partial).

Be aware of your personal biases and projections.

Be willing to let the parties experience their own strength rather than feel like they are being "rescued."

But, not be so neutral that you erase yourself.

Facilitate, support, and defend the transformation process.

Be willing to share personal experiences and vulnerability when appropriate.

Trust your own intuitive knowing.
BASIC STEPS TO TRANSFORMATION

These steps are followed during the course of one or more meetings when you are working out the conflict on your own or when a mediator is involved.

1. Personal Preparation

Look inside yourself to become aware of your feelings and energy in regard to conflict in general and this conflict in particular and try to determine why.

Realize that you are all seeking healing. Imagine creating an outcome that achieves satisfaction for each of you -- one that enhances community for all involved.

2. Obtain Agreements

Agree on the process for conflict transformation.

Agree to stay in the relationship and make it better by resolving this conflict.

Agree to treat each other with respect.

No blaming or name-calling.

Openness to learn from other points of view.

Active listening and no interruptions.

3. State BOTH Initial Interests and Goals (Positions)

If a mediator is being used, you may find it helpful to address the mediator rather than each other.

Take turns, a few minutes each to state the way you experience the conflict.

Focus on specific incidents and don't drag up old unresolved issues.

No personal opinions from people not in the room ("Jane thinks so too . . .").

Describe behavior and your feelings ("When you did X, I felt Y.").

Don't interpret other's behavior. Simply report what happened.

Some helpful questions:

Who has the conflict? (Who doesn't?)

Where is the conflict located? (Where does it not exist?)

How long has the conflict been brewing?

What was the first sign of the conflict?

What are the key events that got the conflict to where it's at now?
How does the conflict currently show up?

4. Restate Each Other's Initial Interests and Positions

Take turns, a few minutes each, to restate what the other said, highlighting the main points.

Concur that the restatements were complete and accurate. Make corrections if necessary.

Pause and silently reflect on how you now feel. Have you both been heard?

5. Continue Bringing Up Interests, Positions and Feelings and Begin Working on Solutions

Keep an open heart. Silently affirm the inherent goodness of the other.

Identify the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and information sources.

Identify underlying principles (vs. positions).

Identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

Each of you defines your success criteria:

"I will know this conflict is resolved to my satisfaction when . . ."

Strive for concrete, measurable criteria.

Brainstorm as many ways as possible to meet shared principles.

Mediator may help with this with the consent of both parties.

6. Summarize Points of Agreement and Produce a Solution

Create a solution that meets your success criteria and is as specific as possible, and therefore less subject to varying interpretations.

If appropriate, write it down and sign it.

Mediator reviews solution to ensure that it is doable.

Agree to maintain confidentiality of decision/process or communicate it only via explicitly agreed upon means.

Agree to follow up with each other at specific times.

7. Follow Up

Check on whether the resolution is being followed.

Revise it if necessary.

Discuss what is the most important thing that you learned from the conflict and what you might do differently in the future.

Celebrate!
RESOURCES

Creating Community Anywhere, Chapter 16.

Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities, pg. 163 - 166.

CoHousing Journal, fall 1994, "Handling Conflict", pg. 1

Adapted from Heartwood CoHousing

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