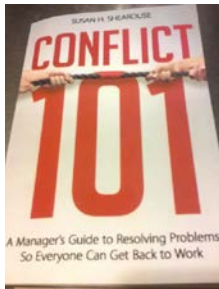


“Conflict 101” by Susan H. Shearouse

Book Review

Publisher:	American Management Association
Date of Publication:	2011
Number of pages:	256
Book Club rating:	4.86
Reviewed by:	Kim Cooley

Plot Summary: (approximately 350-500 words)



As the name would indicate, Conflict 101 is a guide about conflict management and the author, Ms. Shearouse, surprised our club with going beyond the basics in normal “101” fashion to dive into aspects that proved to be educational and quite thought provoking. The author provides situational examples to demonstrate her observations and points and with these examples you find many scenarios hitting close to home.

Conflict 101 isn’t written with project management in mind but it is effective for anyone engaging in the business world which requires interactions between ourselves and others. The book stresses that conflict is a great motivator for innovative change when used as tool.

It also points out that what appears petty at first can sometimes turn into a major war when issues fester and grow cancerous. By attempting to recognize and address issues when they are small, work can be accomplished with less stress, greater enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment.

Ms. Shearouse dives into the physiology of where conflict stem from – offense turned into anger which can become debilitating for people, projects, progress, and relationships. Her use of the analogy that our thoughts and reasoning function as a rudder “giving direction to emotional energy” was enlightening. Most of us are not fully aware of how our reactions to experiences can be trigger responses that actually started long before the current situation occurred.

Book Club Meeting Discussion:

As a group, we discussed our surprise that the book had more to offer than we originally expected (shame on us for judging the book by its cover/title) but we believe this was attuned to the fact that

there was more to the topic and room for growth in this area than we expected. Many of our discussions were ignited by the samples Ms. Shearouse proposed in the book and led to examples each of the club members have recently experienced and how to handle after reading this book.

We felt that the first eleven chapters were the surprising and enlightening material and from chapter 12 on was more of what we had initially expected to read. We felt this last part, could have easily been combined and shortened to make the book more to the point but that is probably because we are a group of professional project managers with extensive histories in juggling personalities and agendas to see projects from initiation to closure.

Many of us felt this was a book that we would like to keep in our libraries plus would like to pass on to other managers including team members. Reading this book and discussing as a team-building exercise could help bring better cohesiveness where the appropriate bonding has been difficult in the past. With Ms. Shearouse's many examples, it is evident that this could be a resource beyond the business world, to home and family life and to other areas where there is the opportunity for better understanding one another.

Personal Comments:

Personally, I really enjoyed the book because it demystified conflict for me. I now see conflict as a puzzle to unravel. And how it's important to keep emotions in check and better understanding where another's outburst might have come from. Managing conflict effectively can help make a project manager stronger at keeping projects on task. Educating project teams about how conflict hinders the project's performance and encouraging them to handle conflict at the first signs of disagreement can help teams bypass obstacles that in the past became roadblocks.

The chapter "Rethinking Anger" was my favorite part. This chapter went into detail about how our brains work and how each brain is different which is why different people respond differently to conflict. Awareness changes the game and by reading this chapter, I'm now more aware of how I react and have a new consciousness of what happens during conflict situations. This could be a new pastime, taking people watching and interacting with others to a higher, hopefully more productive level.