

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT

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A Tale of Two Colleges: Diversity, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution

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*A Tale of Two Colleges was written to show how real people can achieve dramatically different outcomes depending on the strategies they devise and the methods they employ. The first chapter shows people digging in to their positions and trying to force the Other Person to give in. The second chapter shows similarly situated people using the problem-solving negotiation strategy popularized in the book **Getting To Yes**.*

Chapter 1

"**T**he faculty and staff group are here for their appointment." Caroline Kwaitkowski's announcement pulled the provost of Kohlberg College out of concentration on the budget he was reviewing. Dr. Sam Jernigan had agreed to meet with the group but had put the meeting out of his mind in the meantime. He had no desire to deal with the demands of yet another group when the budget was already overextended. Dr. Jernigan asked his assistant to show them in.

Dr. Jernigan greeted them warmly and asked them to take a seat. He had not risen to his present position of importance by giving vent to every burst of aggravation welling up within him. After assuring that all the visitors were comfortably seated and had been offered something to drink, Dr. Jernigan asked them why they wanted to see him.

Professor Molly Beyers responded by introducing the three other members of the group, Professor Jane Ragel, Sandy Fillman, and Mary Schultz. Professor Beyers explained that they were here to demand that the college finally acknowledge the special needs and burdens of parents of small children working at the college by setting up a college

child-care center. She went into considerable detail about why a child-care center was essential. "The college is behind the curve on this. Other corporate employers have long since recognized the importance of providing on-site child care. It's time the college get with the program."

Dr. Jernigan was not unsympathetic to the desires of the women in front of him, but he felt sure they did not understand the position he was in. Enrollment was down and alumni contributions during the last capital campaign did not reach the campaign's goal. He was at this very moment wrestling with how to avoid laying off some people and cutting back on course offerings in order to come in with a balanced budget. he could not possibly introduce a child-care program now. He couldn't even talk about a contribution to off-site child care as part of the employee benefits package.

"I'm afraid that a child-care center is out of the question at the moment," Dr. Jernigan responded. He was never one to beat around the bush. "I am already trying to figure out how to pare our spending to come within our anticipated revenues. There just isn't any money available for anything new at the moment."

"There isn't anything new for women, is what you mean, isn't it?" Professor Beyers was known on campus as a militant feminist, part of the mix of different views with which the college sought to season the academic discussion. She was known for her bluntness, which some saw as deliberately provocative. "Let's face it. If men could get pregnant and had the primary responsibility for child care in our society, this college would have had an on-site child-care center long ago. It's a question of priorities. You spend the money where it's most important. Well, if you want us to continue working here, you'll find a way to treat this issue with the importance it deserves. We're tired of waiting. If we don't see some action on this matter, we'll create a public furor that will make your budget problems look like child's play."

The other women in the room said nothing, but their body language made clear that they agreed with Professor Beyers.

"Let's not be overly hasty about that," said Dr. Jernigan." Perhaps we'll be able to work something out over time. It's just that now is not a good time to be introducing a new program. I agree with you that child care is a good thing. But I couldn't get what you want past the President, much less the board of trustees, which would have to be consulted on something as far-reaching as this. Why don't we set up a

committee to study the matter and report back to us within 6-12 months? Would any of you like to be on the committee?"

Professor Beyers knew what was going on. The Provost was trying to deflect them with a ploy that would cost him nothing but would also not improve their working situation. He hadn't even wanted to hear why a child-care center was necessary. And why should he? He was a comfortable, white, middle-aged male who had never worried a day about taking care of children. She knew his type and refused to be put off.

"Look, Dr. Jernigan. We didn't come here to be side-tracked with some study group. I could give you reams of studies on the need for on-site child care. The time for study has passed. It's time for action. If we don't get some action from the college within the next six weeks, you'll be getting some action from us. We know our rights." And with that Professor Beyers stood up and motioned to the other women to follow her out the door.

Sam Jernigan did not know quite what to do. He had neither the resources nor the stomach for a pitched battle with any faction of the college, even a small fringe group. They were small now but might grow. He had no money for child care. He guessed his best approach would be simply to wait to see what they did next. Ride out the storm, if and when it came. For now he went back to the budget.

"Can you believe that self-satisfied chauvinist?" Sandy Fillman was saying. If it weren't for the work we do, there would be no college. You would think he had no conception of what it means to be a parent and hold down a job at the same time.

Molly tried to cool passions for a moment by suggesting they meet in two days to plan their next course of action. Child care was too important an issue to let drop. Besides, the matter was also about the distribution of power. As long as men were running the college, the resources would be used primarily to satisfy their needs. It was time that women got a share of that power themselves.

Chapter 2

Across the city at Carlsberg College, a state-run and -funded institution, a similar meeting was about to take shape. A group of faculty and staff women had gotten together to address the child care

issue. They talked about problems they were having finding competent care in the neighborhood of the college and the strain the problem was putting both on their families and their performance at work.

Collectively they spent dozens of hours each week just driving to and from whatever service they could find. Some child care providers were clearly sub-standard, with a turnover rate of 2 people every three weeks and virtually no training for the employees. Some women were using friends or relatives as babysitters, not their preferred choice.

As the meeting progressed, Beverly Cooper suggested that they make a list of the various interests they had around the child-care issue.

"What do you mean, Bev?" Georgette Smiley inquired. "Isn't what we are after an on-site child-care center?"

"Well," Beverly responded, "before we get to the solution, maybe it would help if we understood the problem better and why it is a problem for us. I think that will help us find different ways that the problem might be solved and work with the administration on a plan that we both can support."

A few other women raised questions about the procedure before a consensus formed that they should follow Beverly's lead. Someone had thought to set up a flip chart to write down the suggestions and comments from the process. Georgette agreed to take the notes. Beverly assumed the role of moderator.

"So, why is it we are concerned enough about child care to have this meeting?" Beverly asked. It didn't take long for comments to come from all parts of the room. "We want good consistent care for our children," one person suggested.

"We need to assure continuity of the providers. I've heard that is really important in the early years," came from another corner.

"I would like to be able to see my child during the lunch hour if possible, or, at least, sometime during the work day."

"Cost is a big factor."

At the end of about 20 minutes, Georgette had filled up several flip chart pages, which she had taped to the wall for general reference, containing the following notes:

Consistent care
Continuity of service providers
Control our costs
See kids during day
Get fathers involved
Save time in commuting to work
Increase attention to work
Not worry about kids so much
Access to kids for emergencies
Fringe benefit = non-taxable income

At the end of this process, Beverly spoke to the group again: "We've created quite a list of reasons why we think child care on campus would be a good thing. Perhaps, we should call this a preliminary list of our interests. What is important to us, what we really want, is to get our interests satisfied well. Do you agree?"

Heads nodded around the room. But what was she getting at, several people thought, but did not say.

"What I mean," Beverly added, noticing the somewhat puzzled look on some faces, "Is that it is not so important to us how our interests get taken care of, so long as they do. What the program ultimately looks like is not critical if we agree that it meets our needs."

Some of the women were beginning to grasp the point. Others were, frankly, still a bit confused, but they were willing to go along for the moment.

"I'm suggesting that we might want to have some concrete ideas about how the child-care problem could be solved but that we should not assume that those are the only ideas or even the best ideas on the subject. Remember, we will need the cooperation of the college administration to get anything done. And administration officials will want and need to be part of the process. Otherwise, we'll just be beating our heads against a wall, a very old, ivy-covered wall." Beverly was starting to get through to the group.

"Before we start discussing ways to solve the child-care problem, what we might call options or different possible choices, I suggest we engage in another exercise similar to the one we just went through," Beverly said. "This time, let's try to put ourselves in the shoes of the administration and think of the interests it might have on the child-care issue."

"Why would we want to do that?" a voice from the rear called out. "Their interests are their lookout. I'm sure they'll let us know where their ox is getting gored." Several people around the room made motions and sounds indicating agreement with this view.

"Well, sure," Beverly said. "The administration will be looking out for its own interests, and we should not presume to know them better than they do. But I've found that I have a better chance at persuading another person to go along with what I want if I can anticipate that individual's concerns and address them in the way I make my pitch. As any good salesperson knows, you don't persuade someone to buy unless you have some understanding of why it would be in the buyer's interest to do so. If we want to solve the child care problem, we need to help the administration understand why it is in its interest to work with us on this, if, indeed, it is in its interest to do so."

After some more discussion, the group agreed to go through the same brainstorming process as before; only this time, they were trying to think as administrative officials might think. The list of interests they generated included the following:

Control college expenditures Build/keep a satisfied work force Avoid setting precedents for other groups Avoid negative publicity Create incentives to attract high-quality staff and faculty Allocate resources appropriately Be seen as a leader in the community Qualify for federal and state grants

By the time the group finished the exercise, several people were beginning to see that their interests and those of the college might be in agreement or at least not in as much conflict as they had previously thought. It dawned on a few people that they might be able to work on this matter with the administration in such a way as to help each other. But most of those present were not yet thinking that far down the road. They still believed that the administration would resist anything they proposed and that they ultimately would have to exert considerable pressure to get what they wanted.

The pre-set time for the meeting was coming to an end. Beverly Cooper asked what they thought should happen next. "We don't have time for a lot of meetings," Lisa Gunn injected. She had scarcely spoken during the entire meeting. "Why don't you, Georgette, Janice, and Martha go see the Provost and talk to him about it? See what he says."

Beverly was caught a bit off guard. She had been happy to facilitate the discussion but did not think of herself as the leader of this fledgling organization. Still, she was also flattered that someone was placing confidence in her to speak for the whole group. She asked whether anyone else would like to take the lead. When no one spoke up, she

said she would do it. Georgette, Janice, and Martha had helped bring everyone together and had been rather active in the discussion. It made sense for the four of them to work together on this.

Beverly met briefly with her three co-conspirators after the meeting broke up to plan their next steps. "I think the four of us should get together to work out a basic strategy for approaching the administration," Janice Deloria said. "How about lunch tomorrow at my office in the History building?" Everyone agreed.

The next day, the four child-care representatives gathered around a small, round table in Janice's office. The quarters were somewhat cramped, but Janice preferred to think of them as cozy. "Has anyone ever spoken with the administration about this before?" Martha Schlessinger asked. "It seems like it should have come up."

"Not that I know of," Georgette answered. "I think we're on uncharted waters here."

"Well, how should we go about this? Should we work out a proposal for a child-care program and present that to the Provost?" Janice was eager to get down to brass tacks. She did not like fumbling around with a lot of vague discussions. Put something together. Show it to the administration and see what they have to say about it. That was her approach.

"I'm not sure that would be the most effective approach," Beverly offered. "We haven't had any communication with the administration on this at all. Word about our meeting is bound to have found its way to them by the time we see the Provost. Who knows what they will be thinking about what we want. If we come in there with some fixed demands, they might well think it is a take-it-or-leave-it deal and react negatively."

"So what?" Janice rejoined. "I have no desire to pussy foot around on this. The sooner we let them know where we stand and find out where they stand, the better, as far as I'm concerned. We have to be firm. Otherwise we'll just get pushed around."

"I agree that we have to pursue our interests vigorously," Beverly replied. "But we will not advance them by making a show of force that leads to an unnecessary confrontation. As I said yesterday, we will not get this done without their cooperation, and the first thing we need to do is establish contact. I suggest that we get an appointment with the

Provost, tell him that we want to see him about a need for child care, and invite him to have anyone that he would like sit in on the meeting."

"So, what do we say when we get to the meeting?" Janice asked. "I don't want to provoke a fight if it can be avoided. But I want to make sure we don't engage in some mushy-headed generalities that get us nowhere."

Georgette, who was just finishing her sandwich, chimed in, "Well, why don't we just lay out what we talked about at the meeting yesterday. Explain that the lack of child care is causing us problems personally and show how we think that finding a solution to that problem will be in the interests of the college. We could state that we are not there to advocate for any particular solution, although we have some ideas on what might work, but to ask the administration to join with us in finding a solution that will work for both of us."

After some more discussion about the matter, the four representatives agreed that they would take the approach proposed by Georgette and asked Beverly to set up the meeting at a time they could all be present.

Beverly got back to the other three the next day with a date two weeks later. She said she would work up a little outline for what she would say to the Provost and run a draft past them before the meeting. Georgette had agreed at the luncheon meeting to do some research about child care programs at other colleges and work places. Martha had said that she would look into the existing child care options in the vicinity of Carlsberg College and try to find out an average cost. Both she and Georgette would contribute the results of their work during the conversation with the Provost as it became relevant.

While they were meeting, Janice mentioned that women weren't the only parents on campus with child care responsibilities. She had learned of a few divorced men who were in the same boat. Moreover, even the married men should be interested in a good child-care solution. Janice suggested that they bring in some men to help strengthen the group.

Beverly, Georgette, and Martha agreed that they could use all the support available. However, they felt they should not postpone the meeting with the Provost. They could invite the men to the next

meeting of the group as a whole, when they would report on their meeting with the Provost.

The two weeks passed fairly quickly, at least for Georgette and Martha, who found their homework more of a challenge than they realized. By the time they met with Beverly and Janice, they had enough data compiled to make a convincing case that Carlsberg College would have to hustle to keep up with the trend. It seems that several of the leading colleges in the state had already implemented comprehensive parental assistance programs, including child care services. Some provided a stipend as part of a so-called cafeteria benefits plan with special fee agreements negotiated with off-site service providers. Others had set up on-site programs. The four women were armed with significantly more knowledge about child care than when they started, which they could use as a standard of legitimacy for assessing the state of things at their own college. They felt confident that they could make a persuasive case for the institution of a program at Carlsberg.

As they walked into the conference room for the meeting with the Provost, each of the women was slightly nervous. None of them had ever had an official meeting with the Provost. The conference room was rather grandiose and imposing. However, they knew why they were there and had prepared as thoroughly as they could.

Richard Sutherland had been Provost of Carlsberg College for a little over three years. Before coming to Carlsberg, he was academic dean at a small, liberal arts college in the midwest. He earned his Ph.D. from Stanford in English literature about 20 years ago and had never held a job outside of academia. He was exceptionally accomplished in his field and had hit the ground running at Carlsberg. Nevertheless, he still felt like a newcomer with a lot to learn in his new job.

Dr. Sutherland was not personally acquainted with any of the women coming to the meeting. He knew, of course, that Dr. Schlessinger and Dr. Deloria were faculty members with excellent reputations. Dr. Schlessinger was a tenured sociology professor, and Dr. Deloria, an assistant professor of mathematics, was one year away from tenure review. His assistant had filled him in on the current jobs of Beverly Cooper and Georgette Smiley. Ms. Cooper worked in the controller's office and Ms. Smiley ran the financial aid department. Both should be comfortable with numbers, he thought, and understanding of the financial squeeze the college found itself in at this time.

After the meeting was arranged, Dr. Sutherland made an effort to find out more about what the women's group might be wanting to accomplish in the meeting. But he did not learn more than some sketchy information about the original group meeting. Otherwise, he decided to wait to see what the visitors had in mind.

The women were seated comfortably with a cup of coffee when Dr. Schlessinger asked what they wanted to see him about. Ms. Cooper began by expressing her thanks to Dr. Schlessinger for working them into his schedule at such a busy time in the year. She stated that many women on campus, both faculty and staff, felt it necessary to put a child-care program in place at Carlsberg. They had met to discuss the matter, had come up with some reasons why this was not only important for them but in the interests of the college as well. They were here today to share their initial thoughts on the subject with Dr. Schlessinger and to propose that the formation of a task force to work out a mutually acceptable solution to the problem.

Ms. Cooper then proceeded to summarize the reasons why the group considered a good child-care program important for parents at the college and essential for the continued vitality of Carlsberg. Dr. Schlessinger and Ms. Smiley added information about what other colleges in the state were doing and what child care costs were in the area.

At the end of their presentation, Dr. Sutherland stated that he was glad they came. He could not promise them anything. Indeed, he was fairly sure that the college would not be able to contribute financially to a child-care program in the coming year. But he did not want to rule anything out at this stage and felt the task force idea was a good one. "It is important to find a solution," he said, "But it must be one that everyone can live with."

Ms. Cooper stated that, while the task force was their idea, they did not want it to be perceived as simply window dressing or a means for delay. She suggested, therefore, that they agree on a time table for creating the task force and deadlines by which the task force must report to the Provost and the ad hoc child-care group.

"How can we assure that the ad hoc group represents all of the faculty and staff with an interest in this problem? Do you have any male parents in the group?" Dr. Sutherland asked.

"Not yet," replied Ms. Cooper, "But we're working on that. We'll put out posters inviting anyone with an interest to come to the next meeting."

"I want to repeat that I am not in a position to make any promises and cannot guarantee even that the college will support any kind of day-care program," Dr. Sutherland mentioned once again. "But I see that it is a legitimate problem that requires some kind of solution and will work with you in good faith to explore possible solutions."

"And we for our part want to reiterate our conviction that this is a problem that will not go away; nor will we," Ms. Cooper replied. "We want to work with you to devise a solution to it, but it will do neither of us any good simple to dabble around the edges of it. We must roll up our sleeves and get busy creating that solution. We are grateful for your commitment to work with us on this matter and believe that we should make substantial progress within the next six months."

The parties parted with positive feelings. When the four women met for coffee later that day, however, Janice Deloria was not all sunshine. "I don't know," she said. "Did we just get put off with an agreement to engage in some busy work for the next six months?"

Georgette Smiley thought she should answer that question. "Well, the task force was our idea. Remember, when we analyzed the situation, we concluded that there was no way the college would put a child-care program in place immediately; nor can it afford to do so. Besides, we don't want the college coming up with some program without our involvement in what it looks like. We will be better off working on the inside, helping to fashion what it is. If the administration drags its feet and refuses to work with us to find a solution, then we can always pursue our best alternative to a negotiated agreement. But, as you will recall, we were not able to find an alternative that was particularly appealing. We need the college on this, as much as--perhaps more than--it needs us. We need to make this negotiation process work if at all possible."

Over the next six months, administration officials and representatives from the ad hoc child-care group met a total of 18 times. Some of the meetings were difficult, especially at the beginning. But over time, they built a relationship of rapport and trust that served them well in the common effort. The faculty and staff group learned to appreciate some of the financial difficulties of the college, and the administrators

learned more than they thought possible about the importance of early child care and different ways for attending to it.

The negotiators finally worked out a plan none of them thought of, or probably could have thought of, at the outset. With different people contributing ideas throughout, they literally created something new. The final agreement calls for a program to be phased in over the next three years, with faculty and staff being able to choose either on-site child-care facility or a set stipend to be paid directly to one of four different providers in the area.

The college has negotiated agreements with the off-site providers on price and standards of care. By guaranteeing a minimum number of children for each off-site provider, the college has been able to obtain a better price per child than any of the parents could have negotiated on their own.

The on-site program involves an innovation in which students at the college will assist as interns as part of their training as future educators. In fact, the college learned that early childhood education is part of the cutting edge work going on in public education. By integrating its on-site day care program with its academic mission, Carlsberg will be offering future teachers opportunities that few other colleges make available.

The President of the Carlsberg was extremely pleased with the way Provost Sutherland had handled the matter. "You took a potentially explosive situation and turned it into a plus for the college. We need more leadership like that." Beverly, Martha, Janice, and Georgette did not mind the misplaced glory landing on the Provost's head. Sure, it would have been nice to be recognized for having developed a strategy that led to a better outcome for all. But, for the moment, they were satisfied to have helped bring about a very positive result for themselves and other college employees.

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