Healthy Debate the Key to Innovation and Preventing Conflict

As a technical manager, I once had a dream team of very skilled technicians that worked great together. What I found as the coach of this team is that even championship teams have disagreements. As the coach, we should welcome spirited debate and discussion, but prevent conflict. Spirited debate will result in innovation and improvement while conflict ends with lost opportunities.

Healthy Debate characteristics include:

- People being open to hearing everyone's ideas.
- People listen to new ideas whether they agree or disagree.
- People trying to understand the views of other people.
- People using a structured systematic approach to problem solving.
- People not taking anything personnel.
- People working to improve and build on each other's ideas.
- People not being defensive.

As a supervisor here are some personal choices to avoid so you can prevent conflict which can destroy while encouraging spirited debate:

- Don't join in the argument
- Don't ignore the issues with the hope that they go away
- Don't let people get personal
- Don't let people be rude to another or discuss without ground rules
- Don't be defensive about the issue
- Don't encourage the dissent by action, word or deed
- Don't add fuel to fire over time to keeping it going just for the fun of it
- Don't stand by passively and let things burn
- Don't let others to take sides

Here are some basic steps to managing conflict

1. Let emotions be vented.

   The key to this venting is that it is done respectfully. This means people need to listen, as well as speak. Everyone should feel that their concerns have been heard. At the end of the discussion, make sure communications has taken place by repeating the agreed solution to everyone's satisfaction.

2. Resolve the issues with a structured continuous improvement process

   When issues arrive, the correct improvement tool to analyze and determine proper solutions must be selected for use. The correct tool should optimize the effort and generate teamwork in solving the problem.

3. Do not commit to any changes until all those impacted by the change understand the plan and solution so they can see how it benefits them.

4. Use Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) to execute the plan, monitor performance and improve the plan as a team so everyone can see the results and share in the success.