

Interview with Bob Sturm, team leader, SIM-Ethiopia
April 25, 2014

SIM Conflict Resolution Protocol:

1. Individuals who are in conflict are given training/input how to go back to the person with whom there is a dispute and attempt to resolve the matter.
2. If that fails, they go to their one-up and he engages in the reconciliation process with them.
3. If that fails, the Personnel Director* becomes involved. He (not the one up) is has authority to reassign or send someone home.
4. If the Personnel Director cannot resolve the conflict, the sending office is notified and their input sought.
5. If the sending office's input does not resolve the mater, the SIM Director issues a recall/reassignment, in consultation with the sending office, the Personnel Director, and the one-up.

If the conflict is within the chain of command, the supervisor talks with his one up and the one up listens and helps the leader think through and brainstorm what changes could be made in the work or working relationship or responsibilities, to resolve the situation. This is done behind the scenes, but the missionary should notice changes in their leader based on the feedback their leader receives from his one-up.

* This is a position that Bob mentioned he found lacking in MTW's structure - it is not in the chain of command, and in SIM is someone who has been involved determining a missionary's fit and qualifications to take an assignment and stay in that assignment.

Nuggets of Wisdom from Bob's experience

- Idea of a Team Covenant - a signed agreement each team works on together that sets norms, and pledges to respect one another even during times they aren't getting along with one another.
- We must distinguish between interpersonal conflict vs power conflict and take different action based on that assessment.
- The corporate idea of "organizational discipline" - having a clear chain of command and respect for positional authority - is clearly tied to productivity. He feels the only way this can be established is for the Director to be willing to send someone home if necessary (take disciplinary action). There must be consequences.
- In highly-charged emotional situations, both rational thinking and memory ability is suppressed. It's very important, therefore, to de-escalate first before mediating. This usually involves a time of separation or cooling off. You can then set norms for both parties on how they will behave in each other's presence going forward so that the productivity of the team doesn't suffer and the people around them aren't uncomfortable when they are all in the same room together. (Manage external behavior in the event that reconciliation isn't possible or will take a while.)
- There aren't many safe places on the mission field where people can share struggles and get advice. Someone needs to have member care on their radar, and be proactive about it. If it's someone who happens to also be in the chain of command, the key is trust. (Trust that the member care person has productivity as the primary goal, and has the back of the leaders underneath him.)
- People need to know clearly when to escalate a conflict (involve others, take it to the next step or level in the organization), how escalation works, and what the consequences/ramifications could be. It's best not to let people skip escalation steps and go straight to the top. Having multiple people working towards resolution as the escalation process goes up the chain has a lot of merit.