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Strength is good; Wisdom is better

By Melissa Sayer

Everyone in business gets involved in disagreements. Most are small, but some are serious enough that they lead to litigation, and in some cases violence.

High levels of conflict are destructive for businesses. Relationships suffer, Management is distracted from business, and resources are diverted to non-productive uses. Here are four things to consider before you lace up your gloves and go at it.

Be realistic about your situation. Do you have any support for your position in a contract? Do you have any form of leverage? Anything in writing? Remember that whether you attempt to resolve the issue through negotiation, mediation, or litigation, what you are entitled to is not always the same as what you want. Pick battles that you can win.

Define your objective. What is it that you really need? What allows you to conclude the issue and move forward? Define "winning" as getting what you need and getting back to work.

Forget about "Payback". Often people use a dispute as a chance to exact retribution for past wrongs. Being confrontational feels great in the moment, but that moment is short-lived. I have seen many cases where somebody "got tough" because the other guy "had it coming." After all the confrontation and drama is over, I have never seen them feel better for having done so.

Plan for "After." So now that some form of settlement has been reached, what happens? Do you still need to work with this person? Are they still a customer? In the midst of a dispute, it feels like the most important thing in the world. But each dispute is only one chapter in a very long book. Make sure your "victory" is one you can live with.

Nobody likes to be taken advantage of. Combined with the very real frustration and anger that can arise during a dispute, it is tempting to focus on the fight, rather than the solution. But remember what you are after. When it comes to business disputes strength is good, but wisdom is better.

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