**CAPACITY BUILDING FOR TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE**

**MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT AND RESOLVING CRISIS**

**A paper presented by:**

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**1.0 Introduction: The Challenge and Opportunity Before Us:**

Good morning, and thank you for being here. We are here today to talk about a topic that I believe is one of the most important challenges and greatest opportunities we face as union leaders. We will be discussing how we build our skills to handle the tough stuff:how we manage conflict effectively and how we lead our members through a crisis with a steady hand.

Let's be honest, the world we operate in is changing faster than ever before.

We're all dealing with a whirlwind of new technologies, economic pressures,and shifting political landscapes. The role of a union leader today is far more complex than it was even a decade ago. It is no longer enough to be a skilled negotiator at the bargaining table. Weare now called upon to be strategists, communicators,motivators, and pillars of stability.

That is precisely why this conversation is so vital. Strong, capable leadership is the glue that holds our unions together. When we can manage conflict constructively and lead with confidence during a crisis, we build the most valuable asset we have:our members' trust. We maintain unity, and we prove our valueevery single day.The question before all of us is, how do we get there? This paper aims to provide a practical roadmap.

**2.0 What is Capacity Building? Investing in Ourselves:**

You will often hear the term "capacity building" in leadership circles. It can sound a bit like abstract jargon, but for us, its meaning is simple and powerful:it's about investing in ourselvesand in our future leaders. It's about intentionally giving ourselves the tools we need not just to survive the challenges we face, but to thrive in spite of them.

This is not a one-off training session that we attend and forget. It is a continuous process, acommitment to lifelong learning. For me, the goals of this commitment are clear andtangible:

* To Enhance Our Core Leadership Skills: This means building the confidence andcommunication skills to be a powerful, articulate voice for our members in any room we enter.
* To Deepen Our Technical Knowledge: This is our foundation. It means knowing our collective agreements, labour laws, and negotiation tactics inside and out.
* To Foster Strategic Thinking:This is about lifting our heads up from the day-to-day firesand looking around the corner. It's about anticipating the challenges of tomorrow and preparing for them today.

**3.0 The Modern Leader's Toolkit: Core Competencies**

So, what are the essential skills we need in our personal leadership toolkit to navigate conflict and crisis? I believe it boils down to a few non-negotiable competencies.

**3.1 Communication:** This is the bedrock of everything. Open,honest, and constant communication builds the trust we need to lead effectively. When our members are informed, they feel respected, included, and united with us. In a crisis,a clear communication strategy is our single most powerful tool against rumors and fear.

**3.2 Negotiation:** We are all negotiators. While we often think of the main bargaining table, the reality is that we negotiate every single day.We negotiate with management on grievances, we negotiate with our own committees to build consensus, and we negotiate with members to find common ground. Mastering interest-based, win-win approaches is a critical skill.

**3.3 Conflict Resolution:** Disagreements are a natural part of our work. Our ability to manage them constructively is what separates a healthy, dynamic union from a fractured one. This requires skills in listening, mediation, and de-escalation.

**3.4 Emotional Intelligence:** Let's acknowledge the reality of our work:it is often stressfuland emotionally charged. Emotional intelligence is our ability to manage our own reactions under pressure and, just as importantly, to understand with empathy where our members, and even our counterparts in management are coming from. It is the key to navigating sensitive situations with wisdom and grace.

**4.0 A Proactive Game Plan for Managing Conflict:**

Conflict is an inevitable part of our work. The real test of leadership is not in avoiding it, but in how we handle it when it arises. A reactive approach can drain our energy and create division. A proactive game plan, however, can turn a potential problem into an opportunity to build trust and solve underlying issues.

**4.1 Our First Line of Defense: Proactive Mechanisms:**

A Rock-Solid Grievance Procedure: Our primary tool must be a grievance process that is clear, fair, and trusted by all members. It must be followed consistently.

Training Our People: We must invest in training our shop stewards and representatives. When they have the skills to de-escalate and solve problems at the lowest level, the entire union is stronger.

Fostering Open Dialogue: We need to create safe spaces in meetings and one-on-one where members can voice concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal.An issue addressed early is a crisis averted later.

**4.2 Our Toolkit for Resolution**

When a dispute cannot be resolved informally, we have a clear, structured toolkit:

* Direct Negotiation: The first step is always to sit down with the other party and attempt to find a mutually agreeable solution.
* Mediation: If direct talks stall, bringing in a neutral third-party mediator can helpbreak a deadlock and facilitate a voluntary agreement.
* Conciliation: to ensure that at the end of the meeting, all parties went home angry free
* Arbitration: As a final resort, arbitration provides a binding decision from a neutral party, ensuring a definitive end to the dispute

**5.0 Leading Through the Storm:** A Framework for Crisis Resolution

Sometimes,a conflict escalates into something much bigger: a full-blown crisis.A crisis is different. It's a sudden plant closure, a major safety incident, a strike, or a public scandal that threatens our members' livelihoods and the very stability of our union.

This is the moment that defines leadership. You cannot improveyour way through a crisis. You must be prepared, sincere and determined.

**5.1 The Crisis Playbook:** Having a Plan Before You Need It

Assemble Your Response Team: Who is on the team? Who is the designated spokesperson? What is each person's role? These questions must be answered \*before\* a crisis hits.

Control the Narrative:In a crisis, the first message is often the one that sticks.We must be prepared to communicate quickly, accurately, and with one voice to our members and the public. This is our best defense against misinformation.

Communicate with Members First and Foremost: Our members should never learn about a crisis affecting them from the evening news. Our first priority is to get them clear, honestinformation and to let them know we have a plan.

**5.2 Leadership in the Moment**

When the storm hits, our members will look to us. They need to see a leader who is:

Calm and Visible: Your presence alone can be a powerful source of reassurance.

Empathetic: Acknowledge their fear, their anger, and their uncertainty

Let them know you understand what is at stake for them and their families.

Resilient: Project confidence not in the certainty of the outcome, but in the certainty of your commitment to fight for them every step of the way.

Personal Note: Think of a time your union faced a crisis. What was the single most important thing leadership did right? Or what was the biggest lesson learned? Being ready to share a brief, personal story here will make a powerful impact.)

**6.0 Lessons from the Field: Stories and Best Practices**

Theory is one thing; real-world experience is another. Consider these two brief stories:

The Proactive Win: One union invested heavily in training its bargaining committee in new,interest-based negotiation strategies. When it came time for bargaining, they were deeplyprepared. They successfully negotiated a landmark contract,avoided a costly strike, and emerged with members who felt proud and well-represented. Their investment in capacitypaid for itself many times over.

The Reactive Failure: Another union was caught completely off-guard by a sudden crisis. With no communication plan, the leadership was silent for two critical days.Members were left to rely on rumors and media reports. The result was widespread confusion, anger, and a breakdown of trust that took years to repair.

These stories highlight a clear lesson. Our success hinges on preparation and a commitment to continuous improvement. The best practices are straightforward:we must tailor ourtraining to our leaders' real-world needs and foster a culture where learning is an ongoing, valued part of being a leader.

**7.0 Conclusion: Our Call to Action**

To conclude, the message I hope your take away today is this: the challenges facing our unions are significant, but they are not insurmountable.By intentionally building our capacity as leaders mastering how we manage conflict and lead through crisis; we do morethan just solve problems. We build stronger, more resilient, and more powerful unions.

Our work has never been more important. I want to leave you with a personal call to action, for myself and for everyone in this room.

1. Commit to Your Own Learning: Let's never stop being curious. Let's seek out new skills and challenge our own assumptions.

2. Mentor the Next Generation: Let's look for that promising new steward or committee member and share our experience. Our legacy is in the leaders we help build.

3. Lead by Example: Let's champion a culture of unity, respect, and collaboration in every meeting we run and every decision we make.

Let's commit to this work together. Thank you.