

Conflict Resolution Techniques

The state of college baseball umpiring has evolved over the years . However, the last few years have seen dramatic changes to the landscape in which we operate. Media broadcasts have driven much of this change through increasing exposure and thus, revenues. Umpire game fees have increased. Coaching salaries exploded as have the pressures to win. I believe this pressure to win is at the root of coach-umpire relations when situations turn tense. Ejections are now being tracked and have increased every year since the tracking began.

With this said, the ability of umpires to handle situations has become arguably as important as getting plays right. The ability to “de-escalate conflict” is now as important as ever. People much smarter than me have identified strategies to help navigate the psychology of others getting mad (or actually furious) at us. There are times when the conflict leads directly to an ejection. Other times we may be able to be the calming force through the ability to de-escalate conflict.

Guy Harris is an author who has written many articles on conflict resolution. He suggests that the trigger point that leads conflicts to escalate is the perception of threat. He continues to say that the idea to remember when you want to de-escalate conflict is to “make yourself non-threatening to the other person.”

Guy Harris lists his “Five Ways to De-escalate a Conflict”:

1. Listen: When others think you have not listened to their concerns....you will be seen as a threat.
2. Acknowledge and accept their emotions /feeling: this points to understanding where they are coming from
3. Apologize for your contribution: I’m not sure we can always apologize but letting coaches know that we do make mistakes could fall under this point.
4. Control your tone and body language: “A significant portion of the message people receive from you in face-to-face communication is conveyed through your body language and your voice tone. If you look threatening, you are threatening.
5. Focus on the future: Don’t look to have a fault-finding exercise. Instead shift the conversation to what is to come.

Again, the main message is to make yourself non-threatening to the other person.

An Article titled Conflict Resolution Skills in a PDF from the counseling department at edcc.edu states,

“Successful conflict resolution depends on your ability to:

*Manage stress while remaining alert and calm. By staying calm, you can accurately read and interpret verbal and nonverbal communication.

***Control your emotions and behavior. When you're in control of your emotions, you can communicate your needs without threatening, frightening, or punishing others.**

***Pay attention to the feelings being expressed as well as spoken words of others.**

***Be aware of and respectful of differences."**

This is not meant to be an all-inclusive list of what to do during an on-field argument or discussion. There is no check list or flow chart to aid umpires in dealing with irate (and sometimes irrational) coaches. However, there are some strategies and ideas here that could help us deal with conflict situations this year and moving forward.

Have a great year.

Mike Morris