The role of curiosity in conflict resolution

I hope your semester is going very well.

This Reach Out Initiative is to encourage us to be *curious* when the opportunity arises, especially when faced with a potential conflict.

Much of what is written about conflict resolution have many themes in common. These themes include respectful disagreement, active listening, collaborating, avoiding assumptions, honest misunderstanding and keeping an open mind.

It is very common to judge when faced with a conflict. We can easily jump to conclusions without taking the time to explore other intentional possibilities.

In a higher education environment, where learning and acquiring knowledge are core to our essence, *curiosity* (which can be defined as a strong desire to learn), is a natural behavior. Not surprisingly, curiosity also plays a most critical role in resolving a conflict in a constructive way.

It allows us to ask questions to better understand our assumptions and better understand the reason(s) behind another party's actions.

When faced with any type of conflict, (and I am the first person to admit it that this is not easy to do), being curious allows us to place our defensiveness and assumptions aside in order to ask the questions we need answered to help us understand someone else's true motive.

After taking a deep breath, a sample question could be as simple as: "*Can I ask you to explain/expand on what you mean by what you just said?*

A comment could also be as simple as *"I was a bit discouraged (or hurt or felt insecure) when I saw your email. I feel that was not your intention so I hope you do not mind my letting you know how it made me feel."*

Curiosity will help us move from being defensive to becoming collaborative, one of our core values, hopefully allowing us to learn something new as we uncover and address the root causes of a conflict versus its symptoms.

Wishing all of us the very best, Eliane

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