Harmony In The Unit

I have an important question for you... **How do you handle conflict?**

Before we get to that, how many of you were installed in your Unit? Do you remember hearing these words:

“Always remember that the welfare and success of this Unit depend upon you. Therefore, I would remind you of the obligation which every American Legion Auxiliary member assumes, the obligation of preserving the integrity of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary...”

Preserving integrity means being ethical...and the American Legion Auxiliary has a Code of Ethics. It is available on our National website.

The Code of Ethics serves as a guide for conduct acceptable within the American Legion Auxiliary. It is our responsibility as Leaders to adhere to the highest ethical standards to earn and protect the public’s trust in our performance, to carry out the Auxiliary’s mission and be good stewards of our resources.

**Personal and Professional Integrity**
All members, volunteers, and staff of the American Legion Auxiliary shall act with honesty, integrity, and openness in all their communication, business, and transactions as representatives of the American Legion Auxiliary.

**Members and volunteers shall conduct their personal and professional lives in a manner befitting the organization’s mission and values, recognizing that their actions reflect upon the creditability and reputation of the American Legion Auxiliary.**

**Legal Compliance**
The American Legion Auxiliary shall be knowledgeable of and comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, including but not limited to: complying with laws and regulations related to human resources, financial accountability, taxation, fundraising, trademark protection, and licensing.
**Governance**
Make sure your Unit has an up-to-date Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules. Periodically review this document to determine what is working well and what might need to be changed in order to be more efficient, effective or responsible.

**Responsible Stewardship**
The officers, staff, and volunteers of the Auxiliary are responsible for properly managing and preserving assets.

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All of us have unique perspectives that come from our upbringing and life experiences. Volunteers donate their time and efforts to a cause that they are committed to; just because they all share one goal, doesn’t mean that they all agree on the right way to get there. Managing the different perspectives of our members can be challenging. While conflict is a normal part of any social and organizational setting, the challenge of conflict lies in how we choose to deal with it. Whether concealed, avoided or ignored, conflict will likely fester and become resentment, which can lead to infighting within our Units, Districts and Department.

**STEPS TO ACHIEVE HARMONY IN THE UNIT**

1. **Define acceptable behavior:** Clearly and publicly make it known what will and won’t be tolerated. Civility should be emphasized.

2. **Focus on behavior and events, not on personalities:** Put aside your personal feelings and opinions as best you can. Be blunt with yourself in identifying your own feelings and opinions. This is essential to eliminate any favoritism or biases.

3. **Listen carefully:** Understand the WIIFM (What’s In It For Me) position. It is essential to understand the motivations behind the issue. Not all issues are out in the open; they may be hidden.

4. **Identify the issue:** Clarify and stay focused on the issue.

5. **Develop a plan to address the issue:** Is the issue addressed in your Constitution & Bylaws? Do you need outside assistance?
6. **Address the issue**: Resolve issues as soon as the facts are known.

7. **View Conflict as Opportunity**: Hidden behind most conflicts is the potential for a learning opportunity. Look for the upside in differing opinions.

I believe resolution can normally be found with conflicts where there is a sincere desire to do so. The American Legion Auxiliary is about “Service not Self.” Sometimes, that means turning the other cheek, finding common ground, being an active listener and building a relationship where none may have existed. And yes, unfortunately, sometimes our best efforts fail. When that happens, **you must stand firm and resolve the issue by doing the right thing, in the best interest of the organization.**

Example: You have a member that doesn’t attend meetings regularly, and when she does attend, all she does is complain and criticize. In this case, you may need to have a tough conversation with her, privately:

> “Thank you for meeting with me. Our members work very hard to make a positive difference for our veterans, active-duty military and community. Honestly, (Name), we have noticed recently that you seem very unhappy. Are you well? (Members may have an outside issue they need help with.) Are you aware that your comments have been hurting our Unit? From now on, you must refrain from negative comments and criticisms at our Unit meetings. We are all volunteers that need to work together and support each other. If being an Auxiliary member upsets you or no longer interests you, then please look at other organizations that offer what will make you happy.”

What is the penalty for conflict?

You may lose volunteers and the public image of your Unit and our organization may be damaged. This can adversely affect recruiting new members, retaining current members and fund-raising potential. We must work together in harmony to be successful. It is critical that we practice civility to one another.

Make sure to set high moral and personal standards in your life, and... if along the way you happen to fail (as we all do from time to time) then make the appropriate adjustment to yourself, not to your standards.