

# Three (Plus) Important Tips for Church Leaders April 2016

## Handling Differences of Opinion

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Many meetings waste time when a difference of opinion bogs down the discussion, and sometimes results in unnecessary damage to relationships. What if there were a way to address differences of opinion in seconds, and in a healthier way? Equally important, would the difference of opinion be addressed regardless of whether it was something major or something trivial?

1. **Pray while you are listening to the other person.**
2. **Qualify what kind of difference is it,** Is it an “either-or” continuum, paradox, or polarity? Each requires a different response: a) Choose neither end of the **continuum**; b) Embrace both ends of the **paradox**. Alternate each end of the **polarity**.
3. **Discover what kind of fact it seems to be,** Is it true for you as analytical, emotive, synthetic, or belief?
4. **Pick the approach you prefer at this moment – Confront, Avoid, or Postpone!** Ask yourself, “How do I want to respond?” a) **Confront** (act like someone who is not kind, argue, beat up, threaten, be stubborn, fight), b) **Avoid** (walk away from the conversation, give up, ignore, stay silent), or c) **Postpone** (Give it a rest, think about it, delay, “later,” cool off, count to 10)?
5. **Set guidelines for the conversation** that the group adopts by consensus just before the conversation begins.
6. **Reframe the issue or its context** – Such as in Adventures in Attitudes – the anxiety filled driver who was angry at the boy who threw a rock at his new car on a rural road only to find out the boy was trying to get his attention because his mother lay dying in the ditch.
7. **Enlist someone to intervene** – (passively) Sending you a pre-set signal in a pre-agreed way, such as I do when I ask my wife to give me the “cutoff” signal when I am talking too long.
8. **Learn simple responses to opinions** – a) Start with a compliment? b) Start with evidence that you listened? Or c) "I understand what I think the speaker said and I feel..." (the opposite, or differently).
9. **Take the blame and apologize** – as Scott Marcum suggested. You could say, “I owe you an apology.” Friend: “What for?” You: “I had some bad thoughts and attitudes against you and I apologize; please forgive me.”
10. **Ask questions** – What if you ask the wrong question? You’ll find out sooner. Just ask a different one.

### Bonus

11. **Make your own menu** – It’s fun to pick from your own list.

For a more in depth discussion on this excellent resource for Congregation Leadership Development, request a webinar by the same name at [mail@HealthierChurch.org](mailto:mail@HealthierChurch.org)