

Reconciliation at Work at Work

What happens after you give or receive forgiveness? Is everything back to the way it was? Usually, not. It takes more than forgiveness to bring a relationship back to what it was before the relationship was harmed or broken. We can forgive; we can give up the emotional response to the harmful act; but we remember and we hold back our full trust.

Can we get a relationship back to where it was? Probably not entirely, but we can create a new relationship. The point is to take a step; take the first step. After all, what is the worst that can happen? On the other hand, what is the best that can happen? and What can we do to bring about the best?

- The first step, it seems to me, is to make a sincere and firm decision and commitment to seek to repair or renew the relationship that has been harmed or broken.
- From ten years as a high school assistant principal dealing with many student disputes and fights and over a dozen years dealing with employee grievances and negotiations both as a union officer and a school board's chief negotiator, I've learned that there is always some fault on both sides of a broken relationship. So the second step is to consider one's own role and behavior, to accept that one's own behavior likely had some role in the creation or continuation of the conflict, the hurt felt by the other person. The role may be minor, but it does exist. Find it.
- In considering your role, major or minor, in harming the relationship, bring yourself to a sincere regret for your action(s) and a willingness to apologize for it/them.
- Hard as the previous three steps are the next is probably the hardest. Frequently people in conflicted or hurting relationships are willing to repair the relationship IF the other person approaches them seeks to apologize and renew the relationship. The problem is each is waiting for the other. A friend of mine recalls a situation where two colleagues had not spoken for over 15 years. Both were waiting for the other to break the ice. My friend simply asked the one who was talking to him, "If it takes a first approach, why can't you make it? If there is no mutual desire to mend the relationship, you will find out for sure. If there is a willingness to repair the relationship, it will begin." Later that day the man made the approach and several days later, at the end of the seminar, they were seen engaged in non-work required conversation for the first time in 15 years. So this next step is to approach the other person and put the relationship and the desire to improve it on the table.
- If the person is open to talking about the relationship, ask what the other person fears and/or is angry about, listen carefully and non-defensively, apologize sincerely for what you can; and, in return, ask him/her to listen to your fears and/or points of anger.
- Be patient with the other person. He/she may need time to consider and accept that he/she may bear some responsibility for the broken relationship. You went through that reflection before you approached the other person. He/she will need time to process what you tell him/her.
- The reconciliation continues or, perhaps, begins as each person accepts his/her responsibility for the broken relationship and, recognizing that, looks to make amends for his/her own actions or inactions.
- Out of the dialogue and mutual efforts at amends comes a new relationship.

RECONCILIATION — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of reconciliation in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of reconciliation in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of reconciliation in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based reconciliation in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. Is there a relationship at work that needs to be repaired, needs reconciliation? If so, what first step are you willing to take this week?