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AMY SCHERER:

Welcome, everyone to the conflict resolution webinar. We are so glad to have you today. My name is Amy Sharer and I'm a staff number at NDRN and we are so happy to be hosting this training today, it was a collaboration between the VR agencies with the National Disability Rights Network, as well as the VRTAC-QM which is one of the RSA Technical Assistance Center's and they are fantastic, and their staff will be providing most of the content today.

I will let you hear about the background and as a reminder we will have a Q&A period at the end of the content of the presentation and you will be able to ask questions via the chat box and then we also will open it up and have the ability to raise your hand using the reaction tab at the bottom of the Zoom screen.

We can unmute you to ask a question, if you'd rather do it verbally when we get to that portion of the presentation. For that, I will turn it over to Carole.

CAROL PANKOW:

Thank you, Amy! We are excited to be here today, welcome to: Conflict Resolution: He Says... She Says... They Say... And the Ties that Bind them Together and as Amy said, this has been a collaborative effort and a labour of love over the summer.

I understand you had a really successful webinar last summer or you featured three different states with their VR and CAP partners are talking about their very good successful kinds of practices that they had put into place.

It was a really good webinar about communication strategies. We realized when we were planning this that maybe you're not in that place and everything is not in happy land and he might have some rocky situations or strained relationships.

We wanted to take a step backwards and go, "You know what? Let's take a step back and look at some practical tips you can use as you are working together and working for your conflict."

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For presenters for today are myself, Carol Pankow, I am but the VRTAC for quality management and

our project has a mission to partner with state agencies to maximize service delivery and maximize outcomes through quality program and resource management and we know one of the pillars is this relationship and it's one of the things we do work with states on through our technical assistance work.

Prior to my coming to hear, I was with the state of Minnesota for 37 years in a variety of managerial positions and at the end of my career, I was director of the state Minnesota services for the blind for 5 1/2 years.

I had a good opportunity to work with our CAP in Minnesota and I believe they were featured last year in your webinar. And Dan Stewart is one of the individuals who is new to NDRN but I know him really well from my Minnesota days.

We had developed a very good working relationship with throughout my career, I've had a lot of experience in working with advocacy groups and working through conflicts and I'm hoping to draw on those experiences as I talk to you today.

I'm also joined by two colleagues that are fabulous! I have Nichole Tichy and Crystal Garry, both with us this afternoon. Nichole, I will kick it off to you to introduce yourself.

NICHOLE TICHY:

Thanks, my name is Nichole Tichy and I am also a member with the VRTAC-QM and I'm with George Washington University and I am currently a doctoral student in the counseling, education, and supervision program at GW.

Prior to my educational pursuits, I have been in the field of rebuilding counseling for about 10 years. Where my experience focused on the community provider side and I was also a certified vocational rehabilitation counselor in the state of Virginia.

Crystal, can you please introduce yourself?

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Yes, I will do so. Thank you so much. My name is Crystal Garry and I promise, I am a real person. The irony of it is that today I cannot have my camera on for unknown reasons. (Laughs)

But thank you so much for allowing me to sit at the table with you all today.

Prior to joining the TAC I spent 6 1/2 years with a state VR agency directing the quality assurance unit, and prior to that, I was actually in the private sector for a major healthcare organization, leading organization with effectiveness, development, and training initiatives.

Prior to that, I was in the world of adult education. So, like to consider myself somewhat of a rebel without a cause – imagine the conflict that pops up with and all of that!

Again, thank you so much for having me sit at the table with you all today. I'm super excited about this. I'm going to turn it back over to Carol.

CAROL PANKOW:

Thanks, Crystal. Our objective today, we are hoping by the end of this presentation you will have a basic knowledge and understanding of conflict and learned some practical approaches for addressing conflict, and you will learn how to develop personalized conflict resolution skills, and learn how to use key collaboration strategies to build and strengthen that CAP-VR relationship.

It is often easy to identify conflicts based on -- arguments or tension across relationships and besides those telltale signs – what is conflict? I will pass it over to my colleague Krystal who will dig into this deeper. Over to you, friend.

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Thank you. Way to go handing the conflict over to me! (Laughs) According to our friends at Merriam-Webster, conflict is defined as a fight, battle, a war, conflict may also be defined as a competitive or opposing actions of incompatible's, antagonistic state or action and the divergent ideas, interests, or persons.

Conflict may also be a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or even external or internal demands.

Lastly, good old Merriam-Webster says that conflict is the opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to the dramatic action in a drama, or fiction. Talk about dramatic! (Laughs)

So, when we hear about words like fight, struggle, and opposition, it's easy for us to assign a negative connotation to conflict.

Despite all of these words, though, nowhere in this definition does it describe conflict as terrible, horrible, or even bad!

In fact, this definition never uses the word negative – at all.

Psychologically, however, we insert those words because somewhere along our little human journey, we are preconditioned to think conflict is bad! But is it really?

I like to jump into a little story about good old Ford and Dodge. Some people may consider Henry Ford, or may have considered Henry Ford as a visionary.

I mean, this guy comes up, out of nowhere, and he is telling us, "Put your horse and buggies away, I can get you where you gotta go and have the time!"

And the Dodge brothers like what he is saying, "OK, OK, I am with you Ford, on this."

Somewhere along the line, they disagreed with Ford's vision and they said, "Look, you know what? I am thinking of a challenger, you know? I'm thinking of a charger and we will go ahead and part ways for a minute."

Now, imagine if that conflict of ideas would not have been there. Today, we would all be riding around in that same Ford model-T, everyone with the same colour car and same type of car, talk about conflict when we walk out into the parking lot and we all have the exact same car.

Again, think about it – if that conflict wouldn't have occurred between Henry Ford and the Dodge Brothers, where would we be?

Now, that's gonna take me on to another point. If you do not mind – thank you.

So... I want to take a moment and explore two major types of conflict. Interpersonal and intrapersonal. Now, the most commonly cited of these two is usually interpersonal. The conflict between two or more people.

So, why is there conflict between people in the first place? Well, if we refer back to the definition of conflict, we can note that conflict occurs when there are divergent ideas, interests, or people.

Divergent is interpreted as different.

When we consider that people come from different backgrounds, different races, and ethnicities, different genders and sexual orientations, different socioeconomic statuses, different regions within the world, different cultures, etc, conflict may easily arise.

We cannot forget that even within these groups with similarities, there may still be different interests, different hobbies, different abilities and disabilities, and so forth!

And all of these different backgrounds impact perspective, and therefore, behaviour.

We see things differently, so, we act and react differently.

Now, if our conflicts with others isn't enough... we have to deal with intrapersonal conflict. Which is conflict with self, through interpersonal conflict, it may not be cited as interpersonal conflict, I believe it may be just as common – but somehow we brush the conflict within ourselves under the rug.

This type of conflict may show up as me today versus the me tomorrow, versus me yesterday, and all that good stuff.

Just as we are all different from others, it's very likely that who we once were is not who we are now, and who we are now is probably not the same as who we will one day be. We change. Whether for the better, or the worse – we change.

Our values change, our goals change, our roles change. Our expectations change. I can go on, and on with the many ways we change.

So, this change may cause conflict within us. And even when there is little to no change with us, personally, our personal values may even conflict with our goals. Our roles, or even our expectations.

Our personal desires may be in conflict with our personal needs. We may want to go on a shopping spree, but we need to pay those bills instead.

We may want to work with the client to create an individualized plan for employment today, but we may need to send that client to a specialist to help us determine if there really is a disability that would qualify them for services, before we can go on to that.

So, even more so, when we get information that challenges our beliefs were when we think that our fundamentals are threatened, we may experience a conflict with self as we navigate the possibility that our beliefs or fundamentals may be limited.

That is a whole other can of worms there, folks. Let me pass the baton to my friend Nichole.

NICHOLE TICHY:

Thanks. Crystal has given us similar great examples of what conflict looks like in a physical form such as between two people, or even a group of people.

Or when we internally experience conflict. But what happens when the conflict is not physically in front of you, or is not readily observable? Quite often, technology plays a large part in how conflict starts or even how it can end.

The online (Reads) Effect is what clinicians and observers have observed related to individuals behaviour online compared to the usual off-line behaviour.

Ever received an email or view a social media post from someone and found yourself thinking...
"Where did this person come from? This is nothing like them!"

An online format, people can reveal suppressed emotions or feel at ease engaging in certain types of communication as they do not immediately feel the consequences

Also considering the various stages of group development. The storming phase comes to mind, this is the point where group members have developed a level of comfort with each other. And demonstrate a willingness to push against preestablished boundaries.

This can also be the point in the group development where individuals are more expressive and want to stand out. Bruce Tuckman, and his 1965 paper regarding the various stages of group development, also noted that varying work styles or preferences can also clash or create friction amongst group members.

Work there's a misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities, among members of the group, this can also create tension.

On to you Carol.

CAROL PANKOW:

Thanks pal. So, how can I deal with conflict? We will go through some tips. I'm sure you're probably heard this one before, you cannot understand someone unless you walked a mile in their shoes. So, think about this. CAP and VR are both experiencing the same challenging situation, at the same time.

Each of us is just approaching that situation from a different perspective, or a different lens based on the role that you play. So, we want you to settle into this thought as both CAP and VR staff are participating in this webinar. Where this other person coming from?

Challenging person. Alright, let's talk a little more about a challenging person. We all have those individuals that get under our skin. They can immediately set you off but that is where your professionalism comes in.

It can be really easy to fall into the trap of listing all of their negative qualities. Instead of talking about individuals by name they become named accessibility mom, and you focus on the negative qualities. Think about the things you can control, you cannot control other people but we can control ourselves. So, you want to start there.

Pay attention to your own reaction to a situation, whatever steps you can take to keep yourself in check. You want to do that. You want to pause, take a deep breath and think before speaking. In any event, you never want to mirror the behavior being displayed. Really think about your own reaction to the situation.

So, let's take a second and think about a situation where someone has really triggered you, they have really gotten under your skin, what is it about that situation that bothered you? For me I can clearly remember one day coming into the office early, probably about 7 AM. The phone rings and I answer, the person on the other end is hot, screaming hot, they are mad at me, there met its staff, they are mad at the agency, their mad at everything that was ever done forever.

That is not a great start to the day. I remember you get defensive, if people come at me hard, my initial instinct is to fight right back. I had to keep my voice low and controlled, to bring down the volume level, so, we can actually have a conversation.

Also for me, I counted 10, so, I don't blurt out some immediate reaction. For me I also for slow my breathing and my thinking. My mind will race and the next thing you know you will blurt some crazy thing out.

So, you want to figure out what triggers you and try different strategies to lessen that reaction. Crystal,

I will send it to you for some communication skills.

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Thank you friend. I like that you talked about those triggers, Carol. Understanding triggers are so very important. In fact, it's not only important to understand what things may trigger us personally, but it's also important to understand what things may trigger others.

One way to do this is to listen to understand needs. So many times we listen to respond, at least I know I've been guilty of this time or two. Someone is talking to me and pouring their little heart out, I heard them but I did not understand them because I was listening, so, I can put my two cents in.

Not everyone needs or even wants our raggedy two cents. Sometimes we just need to be present in lesson. That is all. Just listen. Honestly, a lot of conflict comes from misunderstanding.

When we are taking in the information, the primary goal should be to understand that information. So, circling back to triggers, when we really listen to understand a person's needs we begin to understand what triggers them negatively and positively. So, our responses and reactions are logical and not based on assumptions.

This is going to take me over to my next point. Curiosity doesn't always kill the cat. I am serious you all! Curiosity doesn't always kill the cat. I know we have heard that, but sometimes curiosity makes the cat more human. More approachable.

This may even help deter conflict. So, what do I really mean here? When we approach situations with curiosity, we become open to receiving information instead of believing that we are the gatekeepers of the information. We know it all. It's important we remain curious rather than making assumptions about what the other person is thinking or feeling.

VR counselors, you may think that CAP personnel are coming in hot or aggressive. Meanwhile, the CAP personnel see this as being of service -- assertive which is necessary for advocating for clients rights. Here you have an example of one approach being interpreted and two very different ways.

It could be easy for easiest -- either side to jump to a conclusion with the other person means. Instead take a minute and ask. What do they really mean?

Try to avoid internalizing the mechanism of communication portrayed by the other party. This may rob folks the wrong way but I will go ahead and say it. It's not always about you.

Everything isn't necessarily a personal attack against you. Just as I said that we should listen to understand needs, we should also ask questions to understand needs and the opposing views, rather than at immediately assigning meaning to those views.

So, to conceptualize the danger of making assumptions, I try to remember what my grandmother used to say to me. It's not going to be pretty but she used to say, "when you assume you make an ass out

of you and me". Ouch! We really don't want that.

Let's switch gears a bit I will have Nichole give us tips about dealing with conflict in a virtual world.

NICHOLE TICHY:

Thanks Crystal, I would be happy to give some tips about dealing with conflict in the virtual world. Remember earlier when we talked about the online disinhibition effect and noted that technology can make – might play a large part in conflict. It can also serve as part of the resolution process.

Have you ever received an email from CAP or even from a VR individual? What is your immediate reaction? Are you feeling angry, upset? Think and reflect on those feelings and where they might stem from.

Individual reflection is one of the very first steps to start managing conflict. If you are having a bad day, are you more likely to react negatively to information coming in, or interactions that might normally invoke conflict?

Has your view on a specific organization, in this case either CAP or VR, been clouded by preconceived notions or assumptions made by others within the organization?

How do these views or even personal experiences impact how you interact with others or even respond to communications?

Some tips to slow down and reflect, or reevaluate how you want to communicate include:

Not responding or waiting to respond. Or even seeking support from a colleague. That email you received this morning, are you reading it in a negative tone because you are having a bad day? Maybe come back to it. Evaluate if it needs to be answered, or ask a colleague how they read that email.

If you want to send email communication, using things like emoticons can be helpful when conveying tone of your intended message. Next slide please.

The term civility and grace are often thrown around and work development training. But what did the terms actually mean? How did they apply to conflict resolution?

Civility is a collective of positive behaviors including treating people with respect, courtesy, incineration, and kindness. These behaviors produce feelings of respect, dignity, and trust.

Teams function better and employees are healthier and are more engaged in such environments. But how does this work?

It doesn't really take much. We often hear tips or suggestions to improve conflict or enhance our reflective processes. But there isn't much of a discussion around how to. While civility is about showing respect, grace is about forgiveness. Both play a crucial role in the complex resolution process.

But how can we implement civility and grace within the workplace? It starts with a few simple steps. Such as being an active listener. Do not think about what you want to have for dinner or even how you want to respond to the person talking. Crystal said earlier, not everybody wants our two cents.

Simply listen and be present, there is nothing wrong with taking a few moments to fully process what someone had just said to you. A simple "I really hear what you are saying, but can I have a few minutes to process and formulate a proper or thorough response?"

Creating an inclusive environment. What does it mean to have an inclusive environment? I feel like this is another term that is frequently used without much clarification or understanding of application.

Basically, we are looking to create a space where people can feel comfortable being themselves without judgment. Acknowledge and validate others. Everyone is going to have their individual perspective or opinion about a topic, there is nothing wrong with that.

It does not mean that you need to have that same perspective, but it's important to respect those differences and finally, remember that actions speak louder than words. Inconsistencies behind what you are saying and what you are doing could negatively impact the environment around you.

And so, to facilitate an environment conducive for civility and grace, it's important to ensure consistent and genuine interactions with others. Even during times of conflict. Crystal? Can you share with us a bit about the term "mental toughness".

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Sure thing, I would love to. As I said, a bit earlier, I want to come back and reiterated that it's not always about you. Many times when we experience conflict with others, we are quick to believe they have something against us personally.

But that is not always the case. In fact, it's probably not the case most of the time. We really have to develop thick skin because when we do have thick skin, we do not allow things to stick to us and dictate our feelings and behaviors.

We develop a mental toughness to help us effectively deal with challenges, stressors, and pressure, regardless of the circumstances. In a way, it's us being proactive instead of reactive.

So, how do we even develop this mental toughness? Let's go on.

First, we have to define what mental toughness means for us personally. Again, we are all very different and we come from different backgrounds.

Your method for remaining mentally tough may be totally different from my method. It may even be different from Nichole's or Carol's. Only you can decide what your breaking point is.

However, you should know that just as Rome was not built in a day, the highest level of mental toughness, whatever that is, is not going to magically appear for you.

It takes work – it takes time. It's all about those small victories: you will have markers and rust spots way before you get to your final destination. If a final destination even exists!

As I said earlier, we change. As we change from our perspectives of mental toughness will change as well. Therefore, habits matter. When everything around us is consistently changing, including our levels of motivation.

Something needs to be consistent. We have to consistently give ourselves those pep talks and consistently decide not to just throw in the towel or have a hissy fit when there is conflict.

Now, this will take me on to another point: developing a thick skin.

So, not long ago, I briefly talked about having thick skin. But I just want to dive into this a bit more right here.

Having thick skin is so important because it keeps us from taking things so personally. Which is often at the centre of conflict, if you think about it.

Instead, we are able to look at things objectively. And this becomes easier when we stop convincing ourselves through self-talk that we are the problem, or others are even the problem, when someone disagrees with our perspectives, it isn't about us! It is about the perspectives.

When someone rejects our ideas or beliefs, they are not rejecting us! They are just rejecting the ideas or beliefs!

So, to remove yourself from the rejection, try proposing an alternative, and while you're at it, try to propose a solution that isn't all about you.

Think about others. Including the party or parties that you consider to be opposing. In a way, this may help you to not worry about looking stupid.

Because when you are considering others, you are looking for solutions – not for problems. Again, you are not focusing on you.

In this, though, you learn to be patient. You may not find the right solutions right away, and that's absolutely OK! Conflict is not anyone's fault in particular. Remember that.

So, do not be quick to play the blame game. Just focus on the solutions.

Lastly, do not hesitate to unstick those sticky situations. You do not want to get stuck in these cycles of conflict because this will prevent productivity, again, just focus on the solutions.

Carol, I will turn this over to you.

CAROL PANKOW:

Thank you, pal. Alright, we placed this meme here and I love this! I'm always open to feedback I can get defensive about and ultimately ignore.

Far too often, this is reality. When provided with negative feedback or criticism, people take things personally and it does not have to be that way.

I will walk you through some steps to respond to negative feedback you will receive.

The first step, you want to listen intently. We have been talking a lot about listening. Let the individual get the story out and do not interrupt.

This means you are listening to understand versus listening to prepare in your mind with what you're going to say and jump and we have reiterated this two times, this is time number three – this is critical and takes practice.

Whether you have to sit on your hands, you may have to do something really radical to make yourself not jump in and let the person get the story out. I cannot emphasize this enough.

Step two, do not react too defensively. It is hard to do and takes (Indiscernible). We are all human beings. The person called your baby ugly.

Step three, you want to remain calm, I've had completely over-the-top situations happen in the past and it's been with parents, or customers, or other professionals.

The more amped I get inside, the worst the situation will go. I have to intentionally work on my breathing, in through the nose, out through my mouth, and we had a coach for my management team some years ago that taught us about breathing and we thought, "This is so foolish."

But really is a powerful tool. I highly recommend you try that. There are loads of breathing exercises online you can Google. Definitely, definitely try that out.

Step four, validating concerns and allow the person to feel heard while providing an opportunity to explore new avenues.

I personally feel that 99% of the time with CAP-VR issues there has been some breakdown in communication along the way. Giving the space for the person to feel heard can help to clear up what might have very well been a misunderstanding.

You can validate someone even when you disagree with them.

For example, you can show you are listening by repeating what you heard the other person said, using descriptive language such as, "What I have heard you say is that you were upset because I was not mindful of the time you spent researching this employment goal."

You can ask clarification to make sure that what you are hearing is what the other person intended. Keep your voice cool and calm.

Step five, be thankful for feedback and be sure to thank the person providing feedback and promised to follow up.

As much as you may be dismayed by the feedback you received, thanking the person for providing it and understanding their perspective could lead to an overall understanding of the situation.

Step six, do not delay on the redo or follow-up. This is so key. There is nothing more frustrating than somebody telling you they will follow up and they do not.

That leads to a whole escalation in the situation. Sometimes, the follow-up may take more time than you anticipated, and if that's the case, say that, too!

I used to tell stuff all the time, "It's gonna take an extra week, as long as you tell people that, tell them about the progress you are making," you have to do additional research but it might take X number of days to get to the end.

That keeps people informed versus them thinking you are ignoring them and they are angry and keep emailing you over and over.

Step seven, present the new work with the general reminder. Of everything that you change further direction. So that they know what to look for.

For example, if you were writing an email you could say, "Per our discussion, find the attached document with revisions in the following section." This provides feedback, validations, their suggestions were heard and provides direction and demonstrate thoroughness when resolving the situation.

Let's look at analysing the conflict. Let's take a step back. We talked about some things that focus on you. Building that mental toughness. Communication skills. Dealing with negative feedback. Let's talk about that – analysing conflict.

When do you analyse conflict you want to ask these questions to help clarify the problem. Let's think this. What triggered the conflict? You, maybe you are a counsellor in the situation and not agreeing with the employment goal the individual is suggesting and they are upset.

Who are you mad at? Are you mad at the individual for being mad at you or are you mad they went to the client assistance program? What are you not getting that you want?

Is it about you personally and having your authority and professionalism being challenged? What are you afraid of losing? Is this about who is right and wrong?

Whatever we live in that rightness, nobody ever wins. Is your conflict or anger accurate or over exaggerated?

You want to take a step back and separate the person from the problem. You view that problem as a specific circumstance rather than attributing negative feelings to the whole person.

I talked about this before when we start labelling people. That approach makes the problem more manageable and helps you to not say, "I cannot stand that person."

Think about it – is somebody just asking questions? That does not mean you are wrong or bad or they are, they are asking questions – that is good! We want that and you want to put things into perspective.

Finally, you want to think about how your conflict can be resolved in working through to sort through the situation can help come to a resolution.

The ability to successfully resolve conflict depends on your ability to manage stress quickly while remaining calm and alert. By staying calm, you can accurately read and interpret verbal and nonverbal communication.

You want to control your emotions and your behaviour. When you are in control of you and your emotions, you can communicate your needs without threatening, intimidating, or punishing others.

You want to pay attention to those feelings being expressed as well as the spoken word of others. Be aware and respect those differences. By avoiding disrespectful words and actions, you can almost always resolve a problem faster.

Remember, we each bring our past experiences, perceptions, and biases into the situations. We are shaped by past experiences and have to work extra hard if some of those experiences were not good, as we were raised, and they are clouding your ability to resolve something in a civil way.

You have to work hard to realize that and move past that.

So, you want to consider this: you can see our meme and this is my attempt at conflict resolution, we all have really different styles and personalities.

It's important for all of us to be in tune with how we respond to stress and conflict. If the way you currently do that is providing negative results, you want to commit to working on other techniques that will serve you in the situation better.

You want to be in tune to others and how they handle stress and conflict, do not purposely do something you know will trigger someone else. I will say that again – do not purposely do something you know will trigger someone else.

You will find over time, you will become very in tune as you are all working together. Make sure you avoid those.

Nichole, I will send this to you to bring this area of at home.

NICHOLE TICHY:

Thanks, Crystal. Think back to something Crystal said at the beginning of the presentation – she presented the conflict between Ford and Dodge sharing this specific message that without the level of conflict, we would not have different options for vehicle selection and it is likely that everyone would still be driving a model-T.

This is similar to differences between companies like Microsoft and Apple. Disagreements occur the development of these brands, and even among brand users.

There are certainly people who prefer Apple products, myself included, compared to Microsoft or android products.

This conflict is not inherently bad. And disagreements are not only a path toward innovation, but provide opportunities for learning.

The literature tells us that conflict can make for stronger organizations and stronger work-related performance. For some, conflict can act as a motivator or an encourager to think about the next new development, or to start thinking about a process differently.

It provides an opportunity for learning about the perspective and values of others, while also learning about yourself.

Yes, there are some negative side effects to conflict, and we are not negating that. We are simply noting that sometimes in order to move forward, there needs to be some level of disagreement because if we all disagreed on one thing, life, honestly, might be kind of boring.

Also, thinking back to when we talked about the storming phase of group development. According to Tushman stages of development, the next stage is norming. Workgroup members have resolved their conflicts or differences and appreciate those differences of others, and leads to the stage of performing where all the hard work and goal achievement can occur.

Experiencing conflict is akin to ethical dilemmas. We all have experienced an ethical dilemma. If we do not think we have, we are not paying attention or need to do self reflection to increase awareness of your role within this group.

Next slide.

CAROL PANKOW:

Alright, so, let's talk specifics, CAP and VR. I'm sure you've all like we've been in this for 45 minutes now, we talked about theory, practical tips, communication skills, what's the real deal with CAP and VR?

We did talk about roles first, it's critical that we understand the roles each of us play in the CAP and VR relationship. A unique contribution that each one of us makes.

Part of that is how we each think differently about the situation and how we bring a different perspective or lens. So, let's look at CAP, the purpose is to advise and inform applicants and individuals eligible for services and benefits available under the rehabilitation act.

In addition, applicant ineligible individuals may be provided advocacy and representation to ensure their rights in their relationship with projects, programs, and services to protect their rights under the rehab act.

CAP is serving in an advocacy role and also provides representation for the individual. There are mostly attorneys ensuring their customers rights are protected.

State VR programs provide VR programs for individuals with disabilities. Those are consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. So, they may be prepared for engaging competitive integrated employment or support and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

VR personnel of the individuals providing VR services for individuals with disabilities. They are the gatekeepers to the services people received. By the very nature of that role decisions are made along the way that may diverge from wants a consumer may have. This all relates back to the unemployment goal.

By the very nature of these goals and responsibilities, conflict can arise when customers feel like the rights have been violated or somebody may have questioned the judgment used word the decision made, if the agency is following their own policies and procedures. CAP's role is to probe and ask questions.

It's essential for them to focus on working on good relationship and healthy culture. Healthy culture start with leadership that set the tone on the top. It is for both CAP and VR. For VR I would urge you all to think about the process that happens when a consumer is dissatisfied with a situation made by staff. The so critical, often talked about like some kind of urban legend with horrible stories and thousands of cases that go.

Everyone is freaking out but this is critical. If you let new staff know how it works, it takes the mystery out of this process. There is value in both the informal dispute resolution process and a value in

mediations and impartial due process. These are all tools to resolve situations. So, remember counselors may only have one or two paces in their entire career.

For CAP, this is the work you do all the time. So, it can be easy to get cheated, all counselors are horrible or the agency sucks. For counselors, having a case and with a mediation or hearing does not mean you failed as a counselor.

The tools laid out and regulations are meant to solve problems. Again this is your toolkit. One of my friends who was a state director used to tell her VRC's, you can call it CAP about a customer, that means you are doing your job and can accommodate them. If you did the job properly did it to the best of your ability and you should never worry about CAP".

Crystal can you tie a bow for us on this?

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Yes ma'am, I would be happy to? We are getting down to the nitty-gritty now. Customers are at the center. I cannot emphasize that enough. Customers are at the center. Sometimes we have to say that enough, so, we really understand who is really about.

Customers are at the center. Customers are at the center! We want them to get into competitive integrated employment. You are seeing the situation through different lenses or perspectives but at the end of the day, the customers are at the center.

So, I think it all boils down to this. Conflict is about the differences. Of that, I think there is no conflict. (Laughs) pun definitely intended there.

However, if you put conflict aside for a minute, it is not about making each other's lives miserable. It's really about the customers. They should always, I emphasize always, they should always be the focal point! Not VR! Not CAP, but the customers.

Whether using a CAP lens or VR lens. It's really all about getting the customer into the competitive, integrated employment. This is the tie that binds everyone together. If there was no customer, there would be no relationships.

That ties what makes you more alike than you even realize. Both VR and CAP advocate for the needs of the client. VR professionals think about how you are advocating for an individual to obtain or maintain competitive integrated employment?

What are some of the lengths you would go through to ensure that the client achieves their goals? Isn't self advocacy a part of the client achieving their goals?

So, if a client called CAP, doesn't that demonstrate some level of autonomy? And empowerment from the perspective of the client? Isn't that self advocacy?

They are using the resources available to them to ensure their rights and needs are being met. That is what they are doing! So, Carol, I want to pass this on to you. So, we can talk more about what this may look like in the real world.

CAROL PANKOW:

Let's talk about a real-world scenario. I think it goes something like this... VR is working with the customer and something seems to break down the communication. The customer is upset and says "I am calling CAP". The counselor gets upset and goes to their supervisor to let them know that they will call CAP.

When CAP calls the counselor is on edge and may ask questions and the counselor gets defensive. The CAP representative continues to ask questions, the counselor feels that their professional skills are being challenged. They feel defensive.

Let's think about this for a second, the thing about their own role and purpose, when a communication breakdown of the customer instead of being angry about the customer calling CAP, the counselor talks through the situation with the customer to gain a better understanding of their concerns. They still want to call CAP, the counselors. Or it is extremely helpful with the information needed to make the call.

When CAP calls, the counselor calmly answers the CAP officer's questions, so, there is transparency and everyone has an understanding of the situation. They are able to talk through the situation come to a resolution. A lot of times a conflict arises because people feel their authority, professional decision has been challenged. You want to ask yourself these questions,

Was I mitigating in a way that was understood? Am I following the agency procedures set forth? Is the decision I'm making based on sound data or personal preference?

When you reflect on your own biases and how those impact your decision-making and judgment, you can really impact this differently and how this all plays out. You want to make sure that you are not demonstrating decisions based on your own personal belief system rather than to use data to make informed decision-making.

You all had an extremely successful webinar last year, I have a link in here to CAP and VR moving forward together, collaboration strategies. This links to both the webinar and the cool tool you will develop. So, I wanted to talk for just a minute about some of those things that you can do when looking at relationships and being intentional.

Talking about formal meetings, informal meetings, and crosstraining. No matter what you choose to do, it does take intentionality to make any of these activities work.

For formal meetings, I liked having this strategy in my own agency, inviting CAP to attend your division, bureau branch meetings, having a training in an open discussion with counselors regarding the process and what the numbers are like. And what really happens regarding an administrative hearing.

I did this and we had CAP folks who'd come in and talk and give the numbers for the year and what they were seeing in the trends and all that. It was really super helpful to dispel those urban legends out there that hundreds of cases resulted in a hearing. The reality is there is very few of those.

As I said before, counters can be taken by surprise because if an actual hearing comes up, they might've only had one or two in their entire careers. Some other considerations when looking up formal meeting, having CAP displayed in your policy committee or your diversity advisory committee. You can have quarterly leadership meetings with them to discuss trends and issues, successes, and problems.

I know Dan and I am a team there went back and we would do this twice a year. We always had it on the calendar. We would go once to the CAP office, people would come to state services for the VR office, we went back and forth and made a part of the process all the time. If something came up here we had to switch the meeting we did but we always held those meetings every six months, major to have those regular touch points which was super effective.

When actively look for ways to strengthen communication and build relationships through this ongoing work together. You also want to think about ways you can incorporate into more formal meetings or crosstraining. I love the idea of inviting CAP members to staff and service training days. Policy changes, everyone is aware of the policy change and why they are changing.

The key is really figuring out your strategy in building these relationships. An actively working to put those invitations out and get meetings on the calendar, and keep going.

Nichole, tell us what effective collaboration strategies?

NICHOLE TICHY:

Sure thing Carol, how did those collaborative relationships generate resulting individual cases of CAP. How do states deal with disagreements? Consultation and accountability, as we said earlier, conflict is not always a bad thing. It's often necessary to increase collaborative efforts and move towards innovation.

CAP and we are have similar goals, what organizations want what's best for the customer. It supported for each organization to do their own reflection or investigation when it comes to addressing complaints. To respectfully engage in conflict resolution, each party must do their own reflective work to be fully present during the conversation.

When it comes to transparency, it means just what it sounds like. This is the opportunity to be open about what goes on in each of the organizations, not only to aid and reduce individual biases, but to also insured that the customer has all of the information necessary to make an informed decision about their complaint process. Developing transparency between organizations provides an opportunity for Colette -- effective collaboration when looking to address difficult cases.

This one is for the VR counselors, let's think about some of the basic counseling skills learned in a

counseling interview skills course. Open ended questions, empathic listening, reflecting feelings, and so many others. Unfortunately, many VR counselors get out of the habit of using the skills due to the pressures and requirements of documentation, or other case management response abilities.

Here is the time to write that metaphor of a horse. Resolving a conflict with another professional organization using many of the skills and techniques often talk to our clients. Sensing anger or hostility or frustration from a CAP representative, respond with something like "it seems that you might be angry, can you tell me a little bit about that?".

This way you aren't immediately engaged in a defensive position. But a manner that allows you to collect information and work towards problem-solving. Another situation might look like a client that says they will call CAP and asked the counselor -- as the counselor you feel angry.

As counselors we learn to reflect on our own emotions and innate countertransference or transference that exists within the counseling relationship. This might be a great time to use the scale of immediacy to gather additional information about the clients desire to call CAP and your initial reaction. The situation might end up with a great collaborative effort with CAP in order to meet the needs of the client.

Crystal, can you give us more effective collaboration strategies?

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Sure thing! Do not mind if I do. My colleagues have given you all a wonderful framework for today. I will keep this really short and sweet because keeping with the theme of conflict resolution, I do not want to create anymore conflict holding you longer than I have to.

Be sure to share information. Do this regularly. Information sharing, as we sort of touched on earlier, we are not always the gatekeepers. VR are not the gatekeepers, CAP are not the gatekeepers, this is all about the customer.

The more you can share that information and reach across the table and partner with each other, the better the results or the outcome is for the clients.

So, again, share that information and share it openly, share it honestly, share it regularly. Collaborate on setting the statewide policies and the overall direction of the agency.

Now, I believe Carol touched on this earlier about how VR – you can invite CAP in and give them a seat at the table to work with you on some of those policies and procedures.

This is going to be particularly important. If you have ever been in a situation where you felt like, "OK, the client ran right over here to CAP, and they are trying to go against us, and they are knocking down everything that is in our policy and procedures."

And then you have a CAP representative reach out and say, "You cannot put that in your policy. You really cannot do that."

Well, a good way to avoid that on the front-end is by collaborating. Make sure that both parties are at the table as you start to have conversations about those policies and procedures, and again, the overall direction of the program.

This is going to make for a beautiful partnership, and more so than anything, for great efforts on the consumer side.

And Carol, I will hand this over to you at this point.

CAROL PANKOW:

Thanks, Crystal. Crystal and Nichole had awesome suggestions and I want to bring it all home. I said this before, in any of these activities will take intentionality, it is consistent hard work that will move the needle.

You do not want to wait for everyone else to start working on themselves. You are going, "They need to do work on them." You are the one person that can change your own actions and how you internalize conflict so you have to do you.

Bottom line, you might have a different opinion about what needs to be done, but we are in agreement that competitive employment is the end goal for customers.

We covered a lot of ground in a short time but we recommend you take this information and think about it. Try to incorporate a couple of nuggets that might have resonated with you as you approach any kind of conflict going forward, after all, practice makes perfect.

If you are in a state where the relationship might be rocky and does not mean you could not get to a great point just because you are not in a great place right now, there is always hope. You have to start somewhere and try to stop

At VRTAC-QM we work with leadership at all aspects of managing the program which includes this very important CAP-VR relationship, I had a situation where one state told me the relationship was a bit rocky.

As we have been working with this PR agency, working with the new policy procedure team, and we encourage them to include the local CAP folks in the review process.

I received a call from the representative asking if I told the agency to work with them and I said I did and they were so happy about this.

The agency is super happy about the input they are receiving and we are seeing these light steps working together. It does take a village, and we work together, we can make great things happen.

This is all we have for you for that we are at the end. Amy popped up on the screen, we do have a little

bit of time to take questions or hear comments and we kindly ask – do not bring up individual scenarios. We cannot handle that in this sort of format and we can take that off-line and discuss it individually.

If you have a question or comment, Amy will give us instructions on how to do that.

AMY SCHERER:

Exactly! Thank you for such a great presentation. I hope everyone sound that as informative as I did. A note about questions, you can put in the chat box which most people are... Just a reminder there is a reaction button on the bottom of the Zoom screen.

You can choose that and choose raise your hand and we will be able to unmute the person whose hand is raised, and you are welcome to make a comment or a question.

CAROL PANKOW:

Amy, Rachel asked if they will get a copy of the PowerPoint. I believe you will be posting that, are you not?

AMY SCHERER:

Yes, thank you for bringing that up while we are waiting for questions. I want to clarify that because it came up a couple of times in the chat box during the presentation. Because I thought the PowerPoint was so fantastic. That is great, already. If you registered for the webinar, you should have received a registration confirmation and maybe did not notice that I attached to that email was a PDF file of this exact presentation.

Perhaps, if you registered late, maybe at the last minute today, you may not have gotten that second email with the PDF file attached.

We put into the chat box, a version of the PDF file of this presentation you can download and save to your computer. If neither one of those options for, feel free to email me – I put my email in the chat box and we would be glad to share the presentation with you.

Hopefully one of those three ways you will actually get it. It looks like we may have a question. Did you want to handle that?

CAROL PANKOW:

Go ahead.

CHERYL BATES-HARRIS:

It's from Jeannie and she is basically making a comment, well, she is asking – can they share this presentation with the VR offices they work with?

CAROL PANKOW:

Absolutely! 100%.

CHERYL BATES-HARRIS:

There are no other questions in the chat box.

AMY SCHERER:

OK. Again, this is a great chance to ask a question, if you have it. Because we do not necessarily get individuals like this together all at one time.

So, feel free to jump in. I think we did get one... let me see. The question I think is: any ideas for working on systemic issues with statewide administrators?

CAROL PANKOW:

I see that from Hannah. Hannah, can you unmute and tell me a little bit more about your question? I'm taking it you are coming from the CAP side.

AMY SCHERER:

What you want to do is raise your hand.

SPEAKER:

(Laughs) OK. Just in general, I think sometimes you will just see patterns, right? And you want to address them outside of any particular client specific needs. Because if you like, you know, it's a pattern that you have seen in this state.

And I recognize that we were hoping to work on those systemic things, and we are asking a lot.

(Laughs) Of VR, right? We are talking about changing policies and potentially training, and it's a big ask.

So, is there anything that we could know from the VR perspective to make those suggestions not seem so overwhelming?

CAROL PANKOW:

Hannah, I think the easiest thing to do – I am not sure if you are in a state that does that right now, if you do not, having those regular touch point meanings between CAP and the VR administration is so awesome!

I mean, I can attest to this with the Dan. We would talk about trends. If they would see a pattern of things happening, I would not always know that. And I love we have the regular meeting to talk about things like that.

We could have a discussion and it would be like, "OK, what are you seeing, Hannah?" And having a conversation and I can take it back and go back to my agency and been like, "What is happening here?"

That is not sort of a threatening situation if you have that regular touch point. If you do not have that set up, I would certainly suggest recommending that. That is really an awesome way.

There is no email that goes back and forth, you're just sitting down face-to-face and having that conversation and we were able to work out lots of things over time.

I really appreciated having that and it doesn't have to be a weekly thing, or whatever, if you do it quarterly, Dan and I did it twice a year it helped.

We would go through and talk to Dan and I would go through and figure them out, and sometimes there were things going on and I was not really aware of that. And I was able to take some action and do something differently.

CRYSTAL GARRY:

I just want to piggyback off of what was just said, I believe that when we have those face-to-face meetings, it humanizes the other person.

I know we've gotten so used over the last couple of years or so of being in a virtual world, and everything is robotic and it's really funny because I met one of my colleagues for the first time in person, just a month or so ago, she was like, "Hey! You do have legs." (Laughs)

I think it so, very important to able to shake her hand or bump a fist, or whatever it is we do these days. You know? Click elbows or whatever it is that we do. But it humanizes that other person.

And I think you are able to see, from their perspective, and vice versa, and I think that definitely makes a world of difference. So, I agree 100%, Carol.

AMY SCHERER:

We did get another question. It's from (Unknown Name). Great to have them joining us. I believe it's a huge time difference. It might be the middle of the night for them.

CRYSTAL GARRY:

Talk about conflict! (Laughs)

AMY SCHERER:

The question in the box is – is there relation in place with filing conflicts with VR or -- this per state?

Essentially, there is a federal due process procedure in the regulations and that can include everything from negotiation, all the way up to them to more formal legal solutions like due process, fair hearings.

That is in place. There also could be some differences per state depending on what's going on in each state. We would be glad to talk to you if you would like to figuring out what's happening there or if you want to review the due process procedures that are in the federal ranks.

CAROL PANKOW:

That's a good answer! That's what I was going to say. Sometimes states have a wonky thing off to the side. Everyone has their own regulations. I have been learning that in the TA world. Maybe I would not be used to that particular thing happening, but every state has their own vehicle going on.

AMY SCHERER:

Absolutely, it could be very different there, as well. We are glad to talk to you about that. Thank you for joining us. I know you are probably depriving yourself of a little bit of sleep. (Laughs)

Any other questions before we wrap up for the day? I did not see anything else...

(Multiple speakers)

AMY SCHERER:

Mary, go ahead.

CHERYL BATES-HARRIS:

Mary, you need to take yourself off mute.

SPEAKER:

Am I off mute now?

CHERYL BATES-HARRIS:

You are.

SPEAKER:

I apologize if you can hear my dog in the background. I was wondering if you could provide recommendations for how to start one of those building bridges meetings?

Say, you've got feedback you want to provide to VR, how would you start that meeting so that you are on, like, started in a positive way so that everyone feel supported and heard and you are bringing those good intentions that you're talking about to the space.

CAROL PANKOW:

Absolutely, in the initial meeting I would talk to the VR director and they may bring enough group of folks, not some big open forum where you are making a big old announcement on everything you are doing wrong. I would talk about it really honestly.

When you talk from the heart, and you just go "there's some things we are seeing we want to do this in the spirit of collaboration and to make our process and relationship more effective".

If you bring it up in phrase it like that off the get go, instead of we have a list of things we want to go over with you that VR is not doing very well. We have seen all the stuff that's not good (Laughs).

I you can think about how you phrase that just a little bit differently, where you are really looking at that spirit of collaboration and you are really interested in that partnership and working together, so, everyone is being very effective for the customers, we are all working with.

I think that's a really nice approach, to start I wouldn't even email it to the director I would call them and have this participation -- conversation. I'd be really interested if we could get some sort of regular meeting going, we think it could be super helpful to our ongoing relationship. We would like to have this would touch base.

CRYSTAL GARRY:

And Carol one thing I would add, I love using these little things that I got even in childhood, away from the table. I realize how important they are here in real life now. My mother used to always say when I was younger, I've always been a people person. Everywhere I go I never meet a stranger, I go up and talk to random people. I would tell my mom, this is my first day of school how I make new friends?

She would say, "well Crystal to get a friend you need to be a friend". So, I think when we talk about relationship building that will be very integral, just reaching across the table and as Carol said, being very transparent in speaking from the heart. Honestly, I'm really interested in partnering with you, at the end of the day we both want what's best for the client and I want to better understand what you are doing over there VR and vice versa, if you have any questions or concerns about what we are doing over here in CAP.

How can we partner and rock 'n' roll here?

AMY SCHERER:

That sounds so great I just wanted to jump in here because I know we went a couple minutes over.

CAROL PANKOW:

I saw that, we are over time.

AMY SCHERER:

Etiquette is because it so much good information to share and some really good questions as well. Thank you everyone, to Nichole, Carol, and Crystal for putting together such a great presentation.

Also quick reminder again, there is a survey in the chat box we would really appreciate if you take three minutes to fill it out. With to provide information to our essay about the impact of our webinar and what people learn from it, it's really hard to give that information if we don't get that feedback from you. So, please do take a few minutes to click on that link, it's very easy to do. We would really appreciate it, again thank you to everyone for making the time to attend today.

We look forward to talking to you more in the future.

CAROL PANKOW:

Bye.

NICHOLE TICHY:

Bye.

Live captioning by Ai-Media