

Recently a famous movie maker was quoted as saying he loved producing films in which “the villain believes he is the hero in his own story.” Isn’t that often the way it is? Doesn’t each of us usually believe he or she is doing the best that can be done for objectives that are right and worthwhile? Well, at least most of us mostly do so; but it is always prudent to remember that despite that natural inclination, we might, in fact, be the bad guy.

This is especially relevant to how parties perceive themselves in condominium disputes. Both griping unit owners and defensive directors tend to see themselves as the ones who are on the right side of every case. But that fact is, that is rarely true. In fact, in our experience, it’s not uncommon for both sides to be doing things wrongly and/or doing them for the wrong reasons.

Therefore, here is our **patented, CK Legal, simple, three-step guide to dispute resolution** that will actually work to help you resolve a majority of conflicts.

STOP

LISTEN

COOPERATE

Stop fighting.

Any first year psychology student can tell you about the “fight or flight” response we, and virtually all other creatures, have when faced with danger or conflict. What they might not know about, however, are the other nuances that affect those seemingly black-and-white options. Amongst them are the whys and ways in which we answer such questions as, “fight what?” and “fly where?”

So, when we say “stop fighting” is the first step in effective dispute resolution, we mean, specifically, stop fighting each other. What you should fight is the tendency in yourself to believe you are always right. What you should fight are unprincipled motives and illegal activities. What you should fly from is the notion that the person on the other side is incapable of understanding where you are coming from, or that he or she has no principled purposes or reasons of their own.

Listen.

Once you have directed your fight or flight responses in the right way, the next step is to listen to the other side. Here, we mean that active kind of listening that engages your empathy and understanding. Don’t listen for what you can correct or criticize – that’s too easy and, frankly, it’s cowardly. The more courageous approach to dispute resolution, is to listen for what you can agree with, and for those points and issues about which you believe you can work together.

Of course, there will be disagreements that are more fundamental and difficult to overcome, but when you have ceased to see the other person as your enemy, and have started to listen better to understand where they are coming from, then you are going to be better able to focus effectively on the problems that lie between you, and more easily begin to discover their solutions. (Hint: Sometimes, you might find out that the solution requires changes in what you are doing or thinking, not just the other guy.)

Cooperation...

is, of course, the natural result of taking steps 1 and 2 seriously. Work together to solve the problems, rather than working yourself into a lather seeking to control or change another person. If both condominium directors and owners will take this approach when facing conflicts and disputes, the vast majority of cases will be resolved without ever needing to resort to litigation, liens or other drastic measures.