Case Study

Conflict Resolution in a Retail Community Pharmacy: Drugmart Pharmacy Case

Carla M. Evans, Nova Southeastern University
Daniel Vacca, Nova Southeastern University
Nile M. Khanfar, Nova Southeastern University
Catherine A Harrington, Nova Southeastern University

Abstract
This case study is based upon actual events that occurred in a retail community pharmacy setting. The case examines the primary subject matter of interpersonal conflict management during normal operations of the pharmacy. Bob, the Pharmacy Manager, experiences several conflicts within the pharmacy and must resolve these conflicts in an appropriate manner as a pharmacist and as a manager. Even though conflict occurs in any business situation, we utilize the pharmacy setting to provide insight into management of conflict in both a professional setting as well as a retail setting. Secondary subject matter examined within the case includes customer service, retail theft, and communication issues between colleagues. Teaching notes will examine the types of conflict occurring within the case as well as the stages of the conflict process, including the modes of conflict resolution and a manager’s self assessment in handling these situations.

Key words: Interpersonal conflict management, pharmacy, customer service, and communication.

Background

Drugmart Co. (Drugmart) is a national retail drugstore with over 6,000 locations in 48 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The chain operates over 50 stores in South Florida where this particular store is located. The store in this case operates in a predominantly middle class neighborhood and has been open for over 9 years. It was early February which is considered peak season for pharmacies and retailers in this area due to snowbirds. A snowbird is an individual that lives in the Northeast United States for part of the year and in South Florida during the winter or cold months. The pharmacy operates with 2 Registered Pharmacists, Bob Martinez and Jack Jefferson. Bob Martinez graduated in 2007 from the University of Florida, School of Pharmacy with a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. He has been working for Drugmart as a Pharmacist since graduation and was recently promoted to Pharmacy Manager. Bob transferred to this store 4 months ago. His staff pharmacist, Jack Jefferson, has been a Registered Pharmacist for the last 10 years. For the last 5 years, he has been employed by Drugmart but has
been in this location for only 3 months. The support staff of the pharmacy includes 3 full time technicians (Theresa, Alan and Louise) and 1 part time technician (Samantha) that only works weekends. Theresa, who has a diploma from a local high school, is a pharmacy technician and has been working for Drugmart at this location for the last 7 years. She is considered the head technician, due to the fact she has been at this location the longest, not because she is in charge of other technicians. Theresa was called the head technician by Stan, the Pharmacy Manager at the store prior to the arrival of Bob Martinez. She has been trained directly by Drugmart in all aspects of her job function to support the pharmacist in dispensing prescriptions. Alan, a young man just out of college is a Nationally Certified Technician and has been working at this Drugmart for the last 2 years. A National Certified Technician has been trained and certified nationally to support a pharmacist in dispensing medications and must accumulate continuing education credits each year to qualify for the certification. Louise is a young woman in her late 20’s and she has been with Drugmart for less than 1 year. Louise is the newest member to the pharmacy team. She was transferred from another store to this location last month. She has the same educational background and company training as Theresa, but she has not proven competent yet in data entry of the prescriptions. Samantha is a freshman at the local community college and is completing her pre-pharmacy course work full time. The pharmacy operates 9am to 9pm Monday thru Friday, 9am to 6pm on Saturday and 10am to 6pm on Sunday. For a pharmacy to be open for business, a registered pharmacist must be on site as regulated by state law. The following event took place on February 5th, 2008 at 9:15am when Jack arrives to open the pharmacy.

Theresa: “Jack, you are late. You were supposed to be here at 8:45!”

Theresa, has been there waiting for Jack to open the pharmacy. Even though the pharmacy opens at 9am, the opening pharmacist and technician arrive early to prepare the pharmacy for business. Theresa must obtain cash from the safe and sign the register onto the computer system before any payments for prescriptions can be made. In addition, the pharmacist must also log onto the computer system. However it is now 9:20am and several patients are standing there, annoyed that once again the pharmacy is not open on time and worried about getting their medications before work. Theresa calms the patients and runs around satisfying their needs while Jack pours himself a cup of coffee.

Theresa: “Jack, I need you to check this prescription so Mrs. Henderson can get to work on time.”

Jack: “Hold on a minute, I am getting my coffee. You know Theresa; I cannot do anything in the morning before my first sip of coffee.”

Theresa apologizes and explains to an irritated Mrs. Henderson that it will not be much longer and physically takes the prescription to Jack.

Theresa: (Frustrated) “Ok you had your sip, now check this prescription!”

Theresa swears that this is the last time Jack will get away with this, even though she has said this many times before. Unfortunately, management has been slow to respond to her complaints and she now is considering transferring to another location.
Promptly at 10am, Alan shows up for work followed by Louise who has been consistently 10 to 15 minutes late for her shifts and is late today. Alan is reliable and very knowledgeable concerning the pharmacy and patients. He practically knows every patient by name and the medication they take. Theresa and Alan take a non-formal break to discuss the morning events by themselves in the back of the pharmacy.

Theresa: (Low voice so no one can hear) “Alan, he was late again and I had to deal with Mrs. Henderson. She was very agitated that the pharmacy was not open on time and instead of taking care of the patients, Jack decided to have a cup of coffee. Mrs. Henderson was not pleased and I had to apologize several times. I don’t need to be dealing with Jack all the time.”

Alan: “I understand Theresa. I opened the pharmacy last Wednesday with him and he didn’t get here until 9:05am. Luckily I didn’t have any patients standing there demanding service at that moment. But the fact still remains that he was late. I wonder what Bob is going to do about the situation, if anything at all.”

Theresa: “Yeah, I have mentioned the problem to Bob and yet nothing has been said to Jack. Bob’s managerial skills leave some to question whether or not he can handle the position, especially since he is so young and fresh out of school.”

Jack: (Shouting) “Alan, stop talking and get back to work. Theresa, we need some supplies up here. I am out of vials and child resistant caps to fill prescriptions.”

Still upset about the morning events, Theresa gives Alan a crooked smile and approaches the pharmacy counter where Jack is busy checking prescriptions.

Theresa: (In a snappy tone) “The bins would be full with supplies if you would have arrived to work on time. Right now that isn’t my job. I am a senior technician around here. Let another less experienced technician like Louise refill the supplies. Plus, you have no authority over me so you can’t tell me what to do.”

Jack is furious but realizes that Bob has never given him any authority to discipline the staff. He obtains the needed supplies himself and decides he will need to speak with Bob.

Bob, the pharmacy manager, shows up early for his afternoon shift. He often does this to utilize the coverage provided by Jack in order to take care of certain managerial duties required of him. Bob greets every associate, ensures that he is not currently needed and then goes to his office to make phone calls. Theresa follows him into the office.

Theresa: “Jack was late again this morning and I had to deal with some very upset patients including Mrs. Henderson while he drank his coffee!”

Taken aback by Theresa, Bob drops his paperwork on his desk and flops into his chair.

Bob: “What do you mean he was late again? I wasn’t under the impression that Jack has been late for his shifts. What time did he get here?”
Theresa: “9:15 and I had to deal with impatient customers waiting for him to arrive. I also want you to know that I am applying for a transfer to another location. I cannot handle the stress this man puts on me. I do not get paid enough to deal with problems caused by other employees, especially when the other employee is a pharmacist. I thought you guys (Pharmacists) were professionals.”

Bob: “We are professionals and I will speak with Jack about his tardiness. Theresa you are a valuable associate of this pharmacy and I do not want you to leave. Our patients rely on you and trust you. Please reconsider the transfer. Just give me one week and I will have the situation under control, I promise.”

Theresa: “Well, I don’t understand why you feel it is important to deal with the problem now. I guess it takes me to threaten to leave before you handle problems. I have told you Jack has been late before and nothing has happened.”

Bob: “I am sorry. I was not under the impression that it was a chronic occurrence. I just figured that he got stuck in traffic or something, but this obviously is a huge problem. I am very aware of the situation now and I ask you to give me one week to resolve the situation.”

Theresa: “Ok, I will give you one week. If he is late again next week, I will process my transfer.”

Bob: “Thank you; I will have a conversation with Jack.”

Theresa leaves Bob’s office feeling partially satisfied. She really doesn’t want to leave this store since she has been here for over 7 years, but she is tired of Jack and wants to see what Bob will do. She’s had several managers before during her tenor, but Bob is the youngest and she is curious as to how he will respond to the situation.

Bob is concerned that Theresa will leave. She is vital to the pharmacy and he would hate to lose such a valuable associate. However, he realizes that she can exaggerate and decides to investigate Jack’s tardiness. He places a call to the alarm company and requests a report of when the alarm has been deactivated in the mornings. Afterwards, he runs a report to see when Jack has logged onto the computer system. This will give Bob a clear idea of when Jack has been opening the pharmacy. Bob decides to wait to speak with Jack until tomorrow since it can take up to 24 hours for the alarm company to fax him the report. Since it is now 12pm, Bob leaves his office to relieve Jack from his position so he may go to lunch.

During Jack’s lunch, Bob has an upset patient who requests to speak with only him. Bob approaches the customer who is dressed in dirty jeans and a raggedy t-shirt.

Customer: “Hello, my name is Ted Smith and I am a customer of SaveCo pharmacy down the road. I don’t know if you can help me but I need a refill on my Xanax (Antianxiety medication) and the pharmacist at the other store said it was too early. I
had to take a couple more pills than my doctor prescribed, since I was robbed at gunpoint last week. Can you help me get a refill?”

Bob: “Ok, give me a few minutes to make a phone call”

Customer: “Thank you, I am grateful for at least that. The other pharmacist wouldn’t even talk to me about it. She just sent the technician over to tell me the prescription was too early to refill.”

Bob calls Drugmart’s competitor SaveCo pharmacy to discuss the customer’s refills and transfer the prescription. He is put on hold and after waiting for 20 minutes, the pharmacist finally answers.

SaveCo: “Pattie, the pharmacist, how can I help you?”

Bob: “Hi, this is Bob from Drugmart pharmacy. I need to transfer a Xanax prescription for Mr. Ted Smith.”

SaveCo: “Oh, of course Mr. Smith would go to your pharmacy. I refused to refill his Xanax early so why would you want to refill it?”

Bob: “Well Mr. Smith was a victim of burglary and he took a few extra tablets to ease his anxiety which is understandable in his situation. I feel that the refill is not that early and would like to get the information from you.”

SaveCo: “Well if you can sleep at night filling drugs for addicts than go ahead. I won’t have that on my conscience. It’s all yours.”

Bob: “Why do you think that? Do you have reason behind your opinion that Mr. Smith is drug seeking?”

SaveCo: “Yeah, look at how he is dressed. Just looking at him should answer your question! Ok, you have all the information to refill the prescription; I have other patients to attend to.”

Bob: “One quick question, did you ask Mr. Smith why he was refilling his Xanax early or did you assume he was just drug seeking?”

SaveCo: (Condescending voice) “I have been doing this job long enough to spot an addict and my job isn’t to discuss their problems, my job is to fill prescriptions. I do not have time to listen to everyone’s pity story. I get paid to fill prescriptions and that is what I do.”

In disbelief of the pharmacists’ impression of Mr. Smith just by his appearance, Bob hung up the phone and submitted the prescription to Mr. Smith’s insurance company. The
insurance company authorized the claim since it was not considered an early refill and Bob dispensed the medication to a grateful patient after proper documentation of the situation.

After the ordeal with the other pharmacist, Jack returns from lunch and Bob goes to his office to make some phone calls. Theresa goes on her lunch break while Alan and Louise fill prescriptions. While replacing stock bottles to their proper locations, Alan realizes he is starting to feel a migraine develop. He candidly goes to the Tramadol 50mg (pain medication) stock bottle, removes one tablet and pops it into his mouth.

As the day progresses, Bob begins to file the staff’s time cards. The technicians are required to clock into the computer system. He notices that over the last few months, Louise has been consistently 10 to 15 minutes late for her shifts. He decides to speak with her before the end of Jack’s shift.

Bob: (Yelling from his office) “Louise can I see you in my office for a few minutes?” Louise reluctantly walks back into Bob’s office.

Bob: “I need to speak with you about being late. I have noticed that you have been 10 to 15 minutes late for your shifts. I am giving you a first written warning and if you continue to be late then I will write you up one more time, followed by suspension and eventual termination.”

Louise: “Nice, I am written up for being late while Alan is allowed to help himself to prescription drugs whenever he has a headache. That seems really fair.”
Bob: “What are you talking about?”

Louise: “Well, bottom line is Alan steals and you write me up for being late. I was under the impression that theft was grounds for termination, not tardiness.”

Bob: “Louise I was not aware of this situation. I will look into it, but I am discussing your tardiness at the moment. Please focus on getting to work on time. That is all.”

Louise storms out of the office, mumbling something under her breath. Bob is well aware that Louise and Alan do not get along. There have been several incidents in the past where the two have had verbal arguments. Never the less, this is a serious accusation and Bob must investigate this as well.

It was a shock to Bob that he was offered the position of pharmacy manager at such a young age. However, he was pleasantly surprised and didn’t hesitate at accepting the position. He understood this pharmacy had some issues but he wasn’t ready for this. After being there for 4 months, he wasn’t sure if everyone was just testing him or the issues were finally coming to a head. Bob’s thoughts were interrupted with a knock at his office door.

Jack: “I am leaving for the day, are you coming out to staff the pharmacy?”
Bob: “Yes Jack, I’ll be there in a minute.”

Jack: “Ok Bob. Hey can I have a few minutes to speak with you tomorrow?”

Bob: (Exhausted tone) “Sure, what about.”

Jack: “Just something I have been meaning to speak with you about. We will discuss it tomorrow. Have a good night.”

As Jack was talking, the fax machine was beeping. The facsimile from the alarm company was printing and Bob thought to himself, “Yes, we will have plenty to discuss tomorrow Jack.”

The following day, business was as usual including Jack being late. Theresa pointed the fact out to Bob as he walked through the pharmacy doors.

Theresa: (Impatiently) “Bob, remember what we talked about yesterday, it happened again, one week is all you’ve got.”

She then went into the back storage room to sign for the daily warehouse order.

Jack: “What was that all about Bob?”

Bob: “Nothing of importance at this moment.”

Jack: “So do you have a minute to talk?”

Bob: “Not yet Jack, I have a conference call with corporate then some paperwork to fill out. How about this afternoon? Before you leave?”

Jack: “Sure that’s fine.”

Jack was frustrated that Bob didn’t have time for him at that moment but decided to wait.

The pharmacy ran smoothly that day. Bob investigated Louise’s accusation that Alan was stealing. He didn’t want to have to deal with an associate who was stealing, let alone it being Alan. Unfortunately, his fears were confirmed by watching the video from the store’s camera system. He knew what he had to do and contacted corporate loss prevention department and set up a time for them to interview Alan together. Before his shift ended, Jack went to speak with Bob in his office.

Jack: “Ok I can’t put this off any longer. I want to discuss with you my authority in this pharmacy. Yesterday, Theresa made a comment that I have no authority to tell her what to do. I am a pharmacist and I feel that she should have to listen to my requests. All I wanted was for her to refill supplies. That was not an
unreasonable request. Also as the pharmacist who works with them the most, I would like to have a say in the evaluation of the staff.”

As Jack was speaking, Bob crossed his arms in front of his chest and leaned back into his office chair. Bob is dealing with many issues and he was not in the mood to listen to Jack’s complaints. Bob interjects impatiently.

Bob: (Raised Voice) “Well, when a pharmacist can’t be on time to work why would an associate who is on time want to listen to that pharmacist? Also, why should you have any authority or say in the staff’s evaluation?”

Jack: “Goodness, I didn’t think that was an issue. My daughter has recently been very sick and I have been late because I visit her in the hospital before work. You know my daughter is sick.”

Bob: “No excuses. Here is documentation of your tardiness and a warning not to be late again if you cherish your job.”

Jack: “What, did you not hear me? I visit my daughter at the HOSPITAL before work. That is why I am late.”

Bob: “We are done here. Go home and don’t be late tomorrow.”

Stunned, Jack storms out of Bob’s office furious that Bob didn’t even take the time to listen to what he was saying. Bob doesn’t even have an ounce of compassion for his situation.

Instructor’s Notes

Recommendations for Teaching Approaches

This case is designed for use by undergraduates in a business management or pharmacy management course. It will help students:

- Identify types of conflicts that occur and which conflict handling mode would be best utilized in specific situations.
- Evaluate the outcomes to determine if the conflict was appropriately handled.
- Provide discussion around implementing a “whole picture” approach to conflict management.

This case can be utilized in its entirety to assign a written report or divided into parts for small group discussion. The case would be appropriate to use in undergraduate management course that deal with conflict management, retail theft, customer service and communication issues. It can also be used as a role playing teaching aid for any of these topic points. Faculty may want to utilize the following topic points in their discussion of the case.
Conflict Management Background

According to K.W. Thomas, conflict is a “condition in which two or more parties appear to be incompatible” (Thomas, 1978). The first step in the resolving the conflict is becoming aware that the situation exists. This awareness of the situation includes whether you are a party to the conflict or will act as a mediator to resolve the conflict. In addition, as a manager one must consider whether a response from administration will make the situation better or worse.

The next step is to realize the manifestation of the conflict (Natural resources management, 1997). A manager must evaluate the type of conflict this situation presents and decide upon the appropriate way to resolve the conflict to obtain the desired outcome. Conflict can be typed as relationship conflict, data conflict, structural conflict, interest conflict or value conflict. Relationship conflict is due to negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication between parties or even repetitive negative behaviors by a party. Data conflict occurs from a lack of information or misinformation, the different interpretations of information and whether it is relevant. Structural conflict are due to forces external to those in dispute such as limited physical resources, time or organizational changes whereas interest conflict occurs due to competition over perceived incompatible needs. Conflict arising from different ways of life, ideology or religion is value conflict (Melamed).

Once a manger decides upon which type of conflict, the next step is how to deal with this conflict. The Thomas-Kilmann conflict handling modes are one way to resolve conflict based upon an individual’s behavior towards the conflict situation. It is based upon the level of assertiveness and cooperativeness the individual displays in a conflict situation. Assertiveness is the degree to which the person satisfies their own concerns whereas cooperativeness is the degree to which the person tries to satisfy the other parties concerns. Based upon this behavior, five methods of conflict handling may be defined. These modes are competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Competing is being assertive and uncooperative and is known as the power-oriented mode while the opposite is accommodating, being unassertive and very cooperative. Avoiding is where the individual is uncooperative and unassertive; postponing the conflict satisfying neither party’s concerns. The opposite to avoiding is collaborating where the person is assertive yet cooperative, and the parties problem solve to find a solution that satisfies concerns of all parties involved. The last mode is compromising, where one is partially assertive and partially cooperative. This mode looks for an acceptable settlement that partially satisfies both parties concerns. Each mode can be effectively utilized by a manager, however most individuals exercise certain modes over others. The Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument identifies an individual’s frequently used modes and describes situations where other modes might be used more effectively. It is a valuable skill for a manager to have the ability to appropriately utilize these modes for conflict resolution. Once the conflict is resolved, the manager must analyze the positive or negative outcomes of the situation and decide whether the appropriate mode was employed.


**Discussion Points**

**Conflict Management**

1. Ask the students to identify each conflict that occurred at the pharmacy from Bob, the pharmacy manager’s perspective. With each conflict identified, have the student’s explain who the conflict is between and which conflict type is it? If the conflict is not resolved, discuss how to handle the conflict as a mediator and explain the conflict mode used to resolve the conflict and why that mode is more appropriate than any other mode. If the conflict was resolved, what conflict mode was used? Was the correct conflict mode used in this situation? If the correct mode was used then explain why? If not, why not? Was the conflict outcome successful? If the outcome was a successful then explain why? If not, why not?

   a. One conflict is between Bob (Pharmacist and Pharmacy Manager) and Louise (Pharmacy technician) due to her tardiness. This is considered a relationship conflict since Louise’s repetitive negative behaviors can have a negative effect upon the other associates. Bob realizes that her tardiness can give other associates the impression that it is ok to be late for their shifts and can also affect customer service. In order to respond to this conflict, Bob utilized the competing mode since he must enforce the rule of being to work on time. This mode is appropriate for this situation since it is assertive and uncooperative. Louise does not give any reason for her tardiness and it has been a chronic occurrence since she transferred from the other location. The outcome of this conflict would be a positive one if Louise arrives to work on time and the other employees are aware that she is no longer tardy to work. Ask the students if any other mode would have been appropriate to use in this situation and to list the reason(s) why a particular mode could have been better utilized? If the students anticipate a negative outcome and Louise is still late for work, Bob then may utilize a compromising approach and reschedule Louise to a shift that she is able to start on time or continue a competing approach until a change in behavior occurs or she is terminated.

   b. Another conflict from Bob’s point of view is between Bob and Pattie (SaveCo pharmacist) who refused to refill Ted Smith’s (Patient) prescription. This can be considered as several different types of conflict based upon the viewpoint of each party. Bob wants to help the patient whereas the other pharmacist just wanted the patient out of the pharmacy. Pattie did not gather all information to properly assess the situation. If Pattie would have spoken with Mr. Smith, her opinion might have changed about him being drug seeking. This can be considered as a relationship conflict from Pattie’s point of view. She stereotyped Mr. Smith by the way he was dressed. It can also be considered as a structural conflict from Pattie’s point of view. She states that she doesn’t have time to listen to anyone’s pity story. It is possible that her company does not provide her with enough support to properly perform her role as a healthcare professional. Bob on the other hand, views his job differently from Pattie. This can be considered as a value conflict between the two individuals. Bob ideology of his profession is one that helps patients
obtain the most appropriate therapy and wants to assist Mr. Smith whereas Pattie feels she needs to only fill prescriptions. Bob appropriately utilizes the competing mode. He is assertive in transferring the prescription to his pharmacy in order to help the patient. The outcome of this conflict is a positive one for Bob since his pharmacy will now gain a customer in Mr. Smith and he fulfills his ideology of his profession.

c. Even though it is not clearly defined, Ted Smith (patient) can be considered as having a conflict situation from Bob’s position. Mr. Smith has brought a certain circumstances to Bob’s attention and has asked Bob to resolve this issue of his early refill. Bob uses his professional judgment to decide that Mr. Smith’s request is genuine and utilizes the accommodating mode when resolving Mr. Smith’s problem. Again, the outcome for Bob and Mr. Smith is a positive one; Bob fulfills his needs as mentioned before and Mr. Smith gets the medication he wants.

d. Retail theft is another conflict occurring within the pharmacy. It is brought to Bob’s attention that Alan (Pharmacy technician) is stealing drugs. Bob must go through a process in order to determine if the accusation is factual. He first experiences a data conflict since he lacks the appropriate information in order to confront Alan. Therefore, Bob must first avoid the conflict in order to gather more information. Avoiding to sidestep or to postpone the conflict satisfies neither person’s concerns. Bob resolves this data conflict by viewing the stores camera system and obtains proof of Alan stealing prescription drugs. Since this conflict has not been officially resolved, the outcome can be defined by the students during class discussion. (See #2)

e. Bob and Jack (Staff Pharmacist) have several conflicts that are occurring between them. Bob becomes aware of the tardiness situation and at first he experiences a data conflict. He realizes that he lacks the appropriate information in order to confront Jack and resolves this by utilizing the avoiding mode and obtains the alarm deactivation report as well as the log-on report for the pharmacy’s computer system. After gathering the proper supporting documents, it is now a relationship conflict from Bob’s point of view. Jack’s repetitive negative behavior of tardiness has caused problems within the pharmacy. He understands that Jack has set a bad example for the other associates and he is now affecting customer service. Bob decides to utilize the competing mode to confront Jack in order to resolve the issue. He informs Jack to not be late again while ignoring Jack’s reasonable explanation. The way Bob handled this conflict will have a negative outcome. Bob does not process the information that Jack is providing on his reasons for lateness. Since Bob assumed a positive outcome with Louise and her tardiness, he is utilizing the same resolution mode with Jack, even though; Louise did not provide a reason for her tardiness. Bob must also understand that Jack is a professional and a peer compared to Louise and he may need to handle the conflict differently.

f. Another conflict between Bob and Jack is in Jack’s role description. Bob does not allow Jack to discipline the staff or to provide input on the job evaluation of the staff, even though he spends a great deal of time with the technicians. This is considered a relationship conflict in various ways. Bob has negative emotions towards Jack due to his chronic tardiness as well as a
lack of communication between Bob and Jack concerning Jack’s role description. With this conflict, Bob decides to avoid the situation by confronting Jack’s other issues and not this one head on. Jack’s recent actions should have no bearing on his need to have more authority over the technicians and to also support Bob in the evaluation process. Bob could utilize the mode of compromise and explain to Jack that he is not in a good situation right now to discipline the staff. However, once his image with the staff improves, Jack can have more say in the discipline and evaluations of the staff.

g. Bob becomes aware of a relationship conflict between him and Theresa (Pharmacy technician). Due to poor communication between the two, the conflict has not been resolved and now Theresa wants to transfer. After becoming aware of the situation, Bob realizes that he might lose a valuable associate and must prevent this from happening. He utilizes the compromising mode by being partially assertive and partially cooperative with Theresa. The positive outcome for Bob is that Theresa agrees to give him one week to resolve the issue.

2. Bob investigates Louise’s accusation about Alan helping himself to Tramadol™ and finds out that the accusation is correct and he has evidence to back up this accusation. Which conflict handling mode should Bob utilize when speaking with Alan about this situation? Explain why he should utilize one mode over another.

   Bob should use the competing mode when confronting Alan about retail theft. As a manager, he must enforce company policy and properly address the situation. In this case, Bob does follow corporate direction by setting up an interview between the employee and Loss Prevention. Bob also needs to make sure he continually communicates with Human Resources around this situation.

3. Are there any situations in which Bob could have used a better conflict mode and which mode would have been more appropriate to use? Describe your reasons.

   Bob should have utilized compromise when dealing with Jack’s tardiness. Jack gave a valid reason as to why he has been late for his shift, however, Bob ignored his reasoning. As a manager, Bob must listen to his associates and try to understand their position. As an associate, Jack should have informed Bob of his situation and his difficulty in arriving at the pharmacy on time. Through compromise, Bob and Jack could have come to a resolution in which Jack could take the afternoon shift until his daughter is better.

   Customer Service

   Ask the students if they can identify the two customer service situations that occur during the case. The first one is the inability of the pharmacy to open on time. Jack can’t open the pharmacy on time to accommodate the patients who need to have their prescriptions before they go to work themselves. Patients in healthcare are trained to wait. Patients wait for their doctor, wait for test results at a local hospital and wait for their prescriptions at their local pharmacy. Waiting is acceptable since patients are waiting for professional services. Each patient expects and deserves a high level of individual care from their healthcare professional. In this case, it is the lack of time management of a professional is the reason for the waiting, not his professional service. The patient has every right to be upset with his actions. To compound the situation, the
the pharmacist, does not show any empathy towards his patients when he is only focused on his need to get a cup of coffee so he can start his day.

The second situation involving customer service is Mr. Ted Smith and his Xanax prescription. The other pharmacist refused to fill his prescription on the basis of stereotyping. Bob was able to look past the stereotyping and took care of the patient’s needs. He listened to the patient’s story of why he is requesting an early refill and also communicated with SaveCo to find out their reasoning behind the refusal to refill. When Bob gathered all information, he verified his decision by sending a claim to the third party payer to see if they would also agree with an early refill. Third party payers normally authorize full payment for dispensing of prescriptions within a utilization parameter. For example; a third party payer may only authorize a payment for a second prescription when a patient has utilized 75 to 80 percent of the first prescription. When the third party payer identified that Mr. Smith’s prescription fell within their utilization parameters, then Bob was able to dispense the medication to the patient. Bob’s service to this patient will definitely add a new patient to his pharmacy.

In both scenarios, the instructor must identify the opportunity cost of losing a patient or customer for a retail outlet. In a pharmacy, the loss of a customer has a large impact to sales since an average price of a prescription in 2007 was $70.00 (Kaiser Family Foundation, Sept. 2008). In the case of Mr. Ted Smith, he presented only 1 prescription that has refills. One must also take into account if this medication is for a chronic or acute condition. This medication is being used for a chronic condition with an increase in dosage due to an acute situation. A prescription used chronically can attribute $840.00 (12 x $70) in sales for this pharmacy over the next year. So the opportunity cost of SaveCo losing a patient could be $840. If Mr. Smith is currently on 6 medications to treat all of his chronic ailments, the opportunity cost could now increase to $5,040 (12 x 6 x $70). Depending on the disease state, the patient presenting with diabetes, HIV or COPD could be an opportunity cost well over $25,000 per year per patient.

Retail Theft

Ask the student if they understand why Bob set up an interview with Alan and Loss Prevention (LP) instead of firing him on the spot? The knee jerk reaction to fire an employee for theft immediately, when the evidence presents itself is strong for a newly promoted manager. It is imperative to handle the situation per corporate guidelines which may include presentation of evidence and investigation by Human Resources and/or LP before any actions are taken with the employee. Human Resources would make the recommendation to terminate employment so the corporation is protected from any employee legal retaliation. Loss Prevention is brought into the situation since the main responsibility of LP is to protect the corporation’s assets. They will interview the employee to find out if this is an isolated incident or not. If this is not an isolated incident and has occurred in the past, LP will try to find out the extent of the theft and try to get retribution from the employee for the entire loss. Finally, since the theft occurred of a prescription drug, the pharmacy may have a responsibility to alert government agencies about the theft. This includes but not limited to local police, State Board of Pharmacy and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).
Communication Issues

Ask the students to identify the competency of Bob’s communication skills. Are there areas that he did well in and what areas does he need improvement?

Overall, Bob did not do well in the communication area. He only had one area where his communication skills provided a positive outcome for both parties involved in the conflict. He needs to improve in the area of using communication proactively, using communication as a tool to drill down to root causes of conflicts, learn how to communicate effectively with peers and learn to listen.

Bob excelled in his communication with Mr. Smith (The patient). He took the time to listen to Mr. Smith, asking for more information about why he was requesting an early refill. Bob also investigated why Patti did not want to take care of Mr. Smith’s needs by asking key questions that drilled down to the root cause. Since he took the time to communicate to both parties effectively, Bob was able to gain enough information in order to make a professional decision and satisfy Mr. Smith’s request. As seen in this example, clear and precise communication is necessary for a positive outcome and hopefully Drugmart gained a lifelong patient.

Bob must improve on his communication skills with Jack (Staff Pharmacist) and the entire pharmacy team. It seems that Bob does not have any experience using communication proactively. If he communicated with his team and set expectations, he could have prevented the conflict with Louise (Technician). In this conflict, Bob waited until he was frustrated with her tardiness and then had a conversation with her. He needed to confront the situation early, examine the cause of her tardiness and discuss a solution that could benefit both parties. However, he did not have a two-way conversation with Louise since their entire conversation was one sided. A normal reaction to the competing approach is for one party to become defensive, preventing feedback from this party. Even though this approach is proper for certain situations, a manager who consistently utilizes this mode may inadvertently send the message to others that you are not looking for input and can lead to a roadblock in communication avenues. Another area where Bob needs to improve on his communication skills is when dealing with another professional (Jack in this case). Again, communicating proactively with Jack when he became a manager could have eliminated the conflict between Jack and Theresa (Pharmacy technician). If he would have clearly communicated Jack’s responsibilities in managing the pharmacy’s technicians early on, they would not be having the present conflict. Bob also needs to understand how to effectively communicate peer to peer. Peer to peer communication has a higher level of respect than a manager to a subordinate. He needs to improve on this area of his communication skills or he will continue to find it difficult to build professional relationships with his peers. Finally, Bob does not use the same skills in dealing with Jack as he did with Mr. Smith. Despite Bob’s feelings towards Jack, as a manager he needed to listen to Jack’s response about his tardiness. Through effective listening, Bob would have opened up the two-way communication necessary to positively resolve this conflict.
References


Author Biographies

Carla M. Evans is a Doctor of Pharmacy candidate at Nova Southeastern University. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology and a minor in Chemistry from University of South Florida. Her previous experience includes several years as a Senior Pharmacy Technician with a national pharmacy chain. Upon graduation, she hopes to pursue a pharmacy specialization residency in ambulatory care and is interested in becoming a Certified Diabetes Educator.

Daniel Vacca, RPh, MBA received his Masters of Business Administration from Clarion University of Pennsylvania and his pharmacy degree from the University of Pittsburgh. He is currently an Instructor/Clinical Pharmacist at Nova Southeastern University, College of Pharmacy. He previously was a Supervisor for a national pharmacy chain and a Manager for a national pharmacy mail service operation. His research interests are in the area of operations, management and finance.

Nile M. Khanfar, Ph.D., MBA received his Doctor of Philosophy in Pharmacy Administration from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. He is currently an assistant professor at Nova Southeastern University, College of Pharmacy. Dr. Khanfar is also an adjunct faculty at the graduate school of H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship where he teaches advanced courses in marketing. Dr. Khanfar has presented several podium and poster presentations at national and international Business and Pharmacy conferences. His research interest includes topics in the fields of marketing, management and healthcare. His work has been published in several peer-reviewed business and pharmacy journals.

Catherine A. Harrington, PharmD, PhD received both her Doctor of Pharmacy and Doctor of Philosophy in Health Services Organization and Policy from the University of Michigan. She is currently an associate professor at Nova Southeastern University, College of Pharmacy. She has held executive positions in pharmacy benefit management and healthcare consultancy businesses. Her research interests include topics in the fields of business, healthcare policy, and drug safety. She has numerous publications in peer-reviewed medical and pharmacy journals.