INTRODUCTION

When working in the entertainment industry, conflicts can easily arise for a variety of reasons. And while many conflicts will usually be resolved without any issues, there are times when these conflicts can intensify, which may result in violence. To help minimize the chances of conflicts ending in violence, it is recommended that de-escalation be conducted in a safe manner to make sure that everyone leaves the situation healthy and unharmed. In this lesson, we will cover some common reasons situations escalate in the entertainment industry, what de-escalation is, the signs of when someone is escalating in behavior, the elements of de-escalating a situation, and some de-escalating tips.

COMMON REASONS THAT SITUATIONS ESCALATE IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Due to a board spectrum of personalities, dynamic work environments, and pressure to complete productions in a timely manner, there are many reasons as to why conflicts may arise between individuals in the entertainment industry or even individuals and the public. Some of the most common reasons for conflicts include:
- Creative differences
- Talent disagreements
- Contractual disputes
- Budget overruns
- Scheduling conflicts
- Public relations crisis
- Audience feedback
- Collaboration difficulties
- Technical disagreements
- Event complications

WHAT DE-ESCALATION IS

To help minimize the chances of conflicts escalating to violence, it is recommended that individuals, when it is safe to do so, attempt to de-escalate the situation. To de-escalate a situation means to use your communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, to calm a person who is agitated, angry, or temporarily out of control and to take charge of the situation to reduce potential violence. This may also be referred to as verbal de-escalation.

SIGNS THAT SOMEONE IS ESCALATING

Whether it is an actor, director, or other member of cast or crew, people are complex and cannot transmit their thoughts from one person to another. A big part of de-escalating a situation involves learning how to read a person. Common signs that people demonstrate when they are escalating in behavior include:
- Clenching of fists
- Tightening and untightening of the jaw

- Pacing or fidgeting
- The rooster stance where the chest is being protruded out with arms away from the body
- Change in eye contact
- Yelling
- Use of profanity
- Bullying
- Active defiance

ELEMENTS OF DE-ESCALATION

How a situation gets de-escalated will depend on the situation. However, the elements of de-escalation do not change no matter the situation. These elements include:
- Staying in control of yourself
- Actively listening
- Empathizing with the person
- Monitoring your body language and tone
- Respecting personal space
- Giving appropriate options
- Being honest
- Setting limits

DE-ESCALATION TIPS

To reiterate, actions to take when dealing with an angry or aggressive individual will be situational, but know that you may have the option to de-escalate. When you have made the choice to de-escalate a situation, make sure the setting stays controllable and safe. Situations can be controlled by utilizing the following techniques.
- Take a breath to get better control of yourself. Taking that breath can buy you a moment to collect your thoughts and observe the situation and the area around you.
- Be aware of your surroundings. This can help you by letting you see anyone who may be witness to your interaction with the person in question, exits and openings that you may be blocking which might make the person feel trapped, and anything that could become a potential weapon should the person become violent. If possible, have potential weapons removed from the area by another person.
- Control your body to appear calm and self-assured by maintaining a relaxed posture. This may involve bending your knees slightly, and your hands being open and away from your sides a little bit. It is recommended that you do not shrug your shoulders as this can be an indication of indifference to the other person. Also, keep your face in a neutral expression as much as possible. Some people may misinterpret facial expressions, causing them to escalate.
- Use a neutral or low, dull tone of voice when speaking with the person. If the person starts to direct insults at you, don't get defensive.
- Respect the other person's personal space by maintaining at least 3 feet of distance between you and them, though a public space of 12 feet is recommended. This distance should keep you out of arms reach if the person decides to react combatively. Moreover, this distance should allow the person to not feel cornered and allow them an escape route if they want to leave.
- Actively listen to the person you are engaging with. This means giving the person your complete attention and maintaining eye contact. Eye contact can give you equal footing in a conversation, so if a person sits, sit. If a person stands, stand. If you feel it is appropriate, paraphrase or reflect their concerns back to them.
- Make a personal connection with the person.

- Don't point fingers at the person you are engaging with. They may interpret finger pointing as an aggressive gesture. Additionally, it is recommended that you not excessively gesture while speaking with the person, this includes fidgeting and pacing.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings. This does not mean that you agree with the person on their position, but that you are expressing an understanding of why the person is feeling that particular way about that situation. This can be achieved by using a statement like, "I understand that you are frustrated by……." or " I understand that you are angry about ….".
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "I want to hear more. Can you explain your concerns with…?"
- Allow time for silence. When you let some silence into the conversation, you allow the other person a chance to reflect on what's happening and how they want to proceed. This includes allowing people time to make decisions, as people who are upset may not be thinking clearly, so give them a few moments to think things through.
- Set appropriate boundaries. You can do this by saying something to the effect of, "It's important for you to be calm in order for us to be able to talk. How can that be accomplished?"
- Choose boundaries wisely by considering what is negotiable and what is not. Offering a person options and flexibility may allow to you avoid unnecessary altercations.
- Don't get into a power struggle. If you are asked a challenging question, redirect their attention to the issue at hand.
- Get them to say yes. It is hard for a person to stay angry if they are agreeing with you. This can include asking a question like, "Your angry because…., right?".
- Make resolutions a team effort. Ask them about their ideas or solutions. However, don't over promise on a solution. Think of this as finding common ground on shared goals or mutual interests, or reminding all parties involved of the bigger picture.
- Suggest that a short break be taken if the situation becomes too heated.

Remember, that while de-escalation can be used in some situations, it cannot be used for every situation. If de-escalation is not working, you should stop the conversation and seek assistance. If you feel that a situation is not safe, leave the area and go for help.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, conflicts commonly arise in the entertainment industry for a variety of reasons. And while most conflicts end smoothly, others may escalate to violence. Before a situation gets that far, you may want to try to de-escalate the situation before it becomes volatile if it is safe to do so. Remember, that choosing de-escalation is a judgement call, and if you feel the situation is unsafe, you should not engage with the parties involved and go for help.