

Conflict Resolution

How to Resolve Conflicts Without Offending Anyone

If you deal with other people, you will, sooner or later, have to deal with conflict. Conflict is not inherently bad. In fact, conflict simply stems from differing viewpoints. Since no two people view the world exactly the same way, disagreement is quite normal. In fact, anyone who agrees with you all of the time is probably telling you what you want to hear, not what he or she actually believes.

The reason conflict has received such bad press is because of the emotional aspects that come along with it. When there is conflict, it means that there is strong disagreement between two or more individuals. The conflict is usually in a relation to interests or ideas that are personally meaningful to either one or both of the parties involved.

Unmanaged conflict can lead to violence and insubordination. Notice the word: “unmanaged”. The key to managing conflict effectively is to learn the skills necessary to become a good conflict manager.

There are three main areas where conflicts occur: in interpersonal one-on-one relationships; in meetings; and in negotiations. Although there are similarities between all of these areas, each one takes a slightly different slant depending on the setting the conflict occurs in.

Conflicts in interpersonal relationships:

Sometimes in interpersonal relationships, such as those between you and employees, there may be a conflict that you are not aware of. If someone who is normally upbeat and friendly toward you suddenly begins avoiding you or being rude, there is usually a reason. If the person has remained cheerful with everyone else except you, chances are you are dealing with a conflict situation. In these instances, you will want to address the problem by proceeding through the following steps.

- Try to determine if there is a problem between you and the other person.

- If you think there is a problem, set up a private face-to-face meeting to discuss the problem with the other person.
- In a non-confrontational manner, ask the person if there is a problem. If his/her answer is “No”, inform the person that you think there is a problem and explain what you think the problem is.
- As you talk, ask for feedback. Do not “attack” the other person with accusations.
- Try to listen to each other with open minds.
- Be sure to respect each other’s opinions.
- Take a few minutes to recycle the other person’s opinions in your mind.
- Try to determine why the other person felt the way they did.
- Avoid “finger-pointing.”
- Try to work out a compromise that pleases both of you.

Conflict in meetings:

Conflict in meetings can be very disruptive. But they can also be very helpful. Remember, conflicts are disagreements. If the person who is disagreeing with you is raising valid questions, it may benefit the group to address the issues they are presenting. In fact, by listening to them, you may gain valuable insight into what is and what is not working within your organization. However, if the person continues past the point of disagreement to the point of disruptiveness, specific steps should be taken. Below is a list of conflict resolution tactics that you can use for meetings that get “out of control.”

- Find some “grain of truth” in the other person’s position that you can build upon.
- Identify areas of agreement in the two positions.

- Defer the subject to later in the meeting to handle.
- Document the subject and set it aside to discuss in the next meeting.
- Ask to speak with the individual after the meeting or during a break.
- See if someone else in the meeting has a response or recommendation.
- Present your view, but do not force agreement. Let things be and go on to the next topic.
- Agree that the person has a valid point and there may be some way to make the situation work for both parties.
- Create a compromise.

Conflict in negotiations:

When you are negotiating with your clients, vendors, or even your employees, it is important to always keep in mind the idea that both parties are seeking a Win/Win situation. No one wants to feel like they are given away something for nothing. In fact, most conflicts arise because one party feels like the other party is taking advantage of them. In order to avoid these types of situations, there are certain principles you can apply to increase your chances of a successful negotiation.

- Avoid defend-attack interaction. It is non-productive every time!
- Seek more information by asking questions!
- Check understanding and summarize. Make sure that you understand everything!

- Try to understanding the other person's perspective. Communication is more than just listening; try to see it their way!

Rules for disagreeing diplomatically

Regardless of the type of conflict you are dealing with; there are several general rules of thumb you should follow whenever you are trying to bring harmony to a volatile situation. Here they are.

- Reflect your understanding of the other's position or opinion. "I feel, think, want, etc." this says, "I am listening to your opinion and I take your opinion into account before I state mine."
- Let the other person know that you value him/her as a person even though his/her opinion is different from yours. "I understand (appreciate, respect, see how you feel that way, etc.)". This says, "I hear you and respect your opinion."
- State your position or opinion. "I feel, think, want, etc." This says, "I don't agree, but I value you – so let's exchange ideas comfortably, not as a contest for superiority."

To become a good conflict manager requires a lot of practice. Just remember that the goal is to reach a compromise that both of you can live with as well as be happy with. In other words, find a way that both of you can walk away feeling like a winner!

Conflict Resolution Exercise

- a. The following statements would be considered inappropriate or very confrontational. Rephrase these statements following the guidelines provided above.
 1. It's not my fault the project was not finished! You didn't give the information I needed!
 2. You are always making trouble for me! You talk about me to everyone and tell lies. I don't even trust you anymore and will tell everyone what you've done!

3. I don't want to hear your side of story. I know what you did and I don't care why you did it! There is nothing to discuss!
 - b. How would you handle the above statements if you were the recipient in a conflict?