

Managing Conflict: Dealing with Difficult People in the Workplace

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Introductions

20 second rap

- Name
- Organization
- Your role in your organization

Conflict is normal

- Where two or more are gathered, eventually there is bound to be conflict.
- Conflicts in the workplace are inevitable.
- The best kept secret is that you should worry when there is none!

Who says conflict is a bad thing?

What are the benefits of conflict in the workplace?

What are the benefits of conflict in the workplace?

- Generates creativity
- Tests assumptions
- Avoids group think
- Fosters robust discussions
- Keeps ideas fresh

Basic Principle: When people are engaged and committed, conflict is bound to occur and that's not a bad thing

So if conflict is good, what's the big deal?

In a recent workforce survey:

- 53% lose time at work worrying about a past or future confrontation with a co-worker
- 28% percent lose work time because they avoid the confrontational colleague
- 37% reduce their commitment to the organization because of a hostile altercation.
- 22% percent put less effort into their work because of bad blood at the office.

Source: University of North Carolina

Unhealthy conflict is problematic

When it is unhealthy, conflict can negatively impact:

- Productivity,
- Innovation
- Employee health
- Employee satisfaction
- Profit

Basic Principle: Keep the healthy conflict and get rid of unhealthy conflict.

Factors that create unhealthy conflict

What creates unhealthy work place conflict?

What creates unhealthy work place conflict?

- Lack of clarity on goals, assignments, roles, boundaries
- Failure to communicate
- Miscommunication
- Clashing personalities
- Differences in style
- Backbiting
- Hidden agendas
- Failure to address conflicts

Critical Elements for Keeping it Healthy

- Be sure employees understand what you are trying to accomplish and how you hope to get there
- Set clear expectations for moving the work agenda and hold staff accountable
- Set norms and boundaries
- Encourage an acceptance of different working styles and perspectives.
- Be aware of and respect differences, but stay on script
- Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!

Basic Principle: Creating a workplace that supports healthy conflict begins with effective management

Managing your role in the workplace dynamic

- Take care of yourself – eat well, exercise and sleep
- Expect conflict
- Control your emotions and behavior
- Be respectful
- Listen actively to employees and the workplace
- Be willing to ask and answer, “Is there something about the work situation or my style that is generating conflict?”
- Hold your own counsel or share with everyone
- Remain calm

Basic Principle: Recognize that you are a factor too!

Five Approaches to Conflict

- Avoid
- Accommodate
- Compromise
- Confront/compete
- Collaborate

Basic Principle: There are different styles in managing conflict and each style is useful depending on the situation.

Avoid

- Ignore it and hope it goes away
- Evade the conflict entirely
- Accept default decisions

Accommodate

- Keep the peace
- Just go along
- Default to making the needs of others the highest priority

Compromise

- Find a solution that at least partially satisfies everybody
- Make everyone give up something
- Reach the middle ground
- Find the least common denominator

Confront/Compete

- Directly address the conflict
- Stay in it to win it
- Make the case

Collaborate

- Work it out together
- Meet the needs of every stakeholder
- Give everyone the opportunity for input
- Work toward everyone owning the decision

Approaches to conflict

Think about conflicts in which you have been involved:

- Which style do you tend to lean towards when conflict arises?
- What is the downside of your style?

Approaches to conflict

- Think about the five different styles:
 - Avoid
 - Accommodate
 - Compromise
 - Confront/compete
 - Collaborate
- When is each style appropriate? Give an example.
- Which style would you like to develop more?

What about the conflict created by difficult people?

- There will be people in the workplace who cause problems and issues, through inappropriate or unhelpful behavior that creates or contributes to unhealthy conflict.
- When there is conflict that threatens a positive workplace environment, failure to intervene is not an option if you value your colleagues and employees.

Basic Principle: Unresolved conflict sits just below the surface, becomes the elephant in the room and, left unchecked, creates a toxic environment.

The same principle of effective management applies

- Stress the priority: There's a job to do and it comes first!
- Be proactive: Make employees aware of policies regarding conflicts, disputes, and inappropriate behavior – and uphold the policies.
- Nip the problems in the bud: Be aware of brewing conflicts cliques, arguments, flaring tempers and clashing personalities.

Basic Principle: Managing difficult people in the workplace begins with effective management.

Check your contributing role

- Be calm and stay centered: It won't help to lose your cool or your perspective
- Listen to understand motivations and triggers
- Focus on what actions can be taken

Basic Principle: You may not be able to change what the other person does but you can change the way you react to it. Being stuck in anger, frustration, or blame will not help.

What types of traits make for difficult people

- Arrogant
- Know it all
- Whining/whimpering/complaining
- Demanding
- Controlling/authoritative
- Uncooperative
- Inconsistent
- Laissez faire

What the hell am I suppose to do?

- Stop wishing they were different!
- Communicate the performance you expect.
- Reward behavior and achievements that support the work.
- Help the staff to know their own styles and the dynamics of their different styles.

Basic Principle: Don't expect to change people! You must manage the team dynamic.

When the workplace dynamic ignites unhealthy conflict.....

You must take action!

Can you resolve the dynamic with simple communication?

- Sometimes just speaking the dynamic will clear the air
- Talk with staff about how you value and use each of their styles to create a strong team
- Acknowledge styles of staff and spend some time talking about the dynamics. Instruments help structure discussions:
 - Medicine Wheel
 - Myers Briggs
 - Tetra Map

What is your personality style?

Lion – Let's do it now!

Beaver – How was it done in the past?

Otter - Trust me! It will work out!

Golden Retriever – Let's keep things the way they are!

Lions

This personality likes to lead. The lion is good at making decisions and is very goal-oriented. They enjoy challenges, difficult assignments, and opportunity for advancement. Because lions are thinking of the goal, they can step on people to reach it. Lions can be very aggressive and competitive. Lions must learn not to be too bossy or to take charge in others' affairs.

Otters

Otters are very social creature. Otter personalities love people. They enjoys being popular and influencing and motivating others. Otters can sometimes be hurt when people do not like them. Otter personalities usually have lots of friends, but not deep relationships. They love to goof-off. (They are notorious for messy rooms.) Otters like to hurry and finish jobs. (But jobs are not often done well.) The otter personality is like Tigger in Winnie the Pooh.

Golden Retrievers

Good at making friends. Very loyal. Retriever personalities do not like big changes. They look for security. Can be very sensitive. Very caring. They have deep relationships, but usually only a couple of close friends. Wants to be loved by everyone. Looks for appreciation. Works best in a limited situation with a steady work pattern.

Beavers

Organized. Beavers think that there is a right way to do everything and they want to do it exactly that way. Beaver personalities are very creative. They desire to solve everything. Desire to take their time and do it right. Beavers do not like sudden changes. They need reassurance.

Can you resolve the conflict with simple communication?

Approach the individual

- Check your perceptions at the door
- Ask the rationale for a behavior or an action

Identify the issue(s): What is the real problem?

- Listen actively
- Listen to understand
- Offer constructive feedback

Can you resolve the behavior with simple communication?

Jointly brainstorm possible solutions or alternative approaches

- Evaluate the options
- Make resolution of the issue the priority rather than the need to be right
- Agree to a specific course of action and date certain to check progress

Basic principle: Focus on the real problems and create a plan of action not just an assurance to do better.

Will a structured discussion between multiple parties help?

- Find a neutral space and sufficient time to hear all viewpoints
- Meet with the parties together
- Let the parties know that you are not there to choose sides, but to facilitate a conversation between them in hopes that they will resolve the conflict for themselves

Will a structured discussion help?

- Set the rules before you begin
 - Each party will have the opportunity to present his/her point of view without interruption
 - Each party should actively listen to the other
 - Personal attacks are not acceptable
- Let each party briefly summarize their point of view, without comment or interruption by the other party
- Intervene if either employee attacks the other

Will a structured discussion help?

- Let each party know you hear and understand what they are saying by restating or reframing his/her statement or position
- Ask clarifying questions, but not judgmental questions
- Meet with each party separately to see if there is the opportunity for resolution

Will a structured discussion help?

- Ask each participant to describe specific actions they'd like to see the other party take that would resolve the differences
- Ask each party if he/she can agree to the suggestions
- Memorialize the agreement of the parties
- Set a date and time to check in on progress

Is this a situation that might be resolved collaboratively?

- Frame the issue
- Discuss the impact on the workplace, without assigning blame
- Brainstorm specific actions that can be implemented right away to mitigate the negative impact
- Secure everyone's commitment to making the changes necessary to resolve the situation

There are no guarantees that any of this works all the time

- Sometimes there will be employees that are unwilling or unable to contribute to a healthy workplace environment
- Explain the consequence for continuing problematic behavior
- Take the necessary action

Basic Principle: Transferring, demotion or firing are always options. Use them when they are appropriate.