

GUIDE TO MANAGING CONFLICT

1. Don't ignore something that bothers you. Address the conflict before the situation becomes intolerable to you. If emotions are dominating reactions, take a "cooling off" period with an agreed upon time to deal with the issue later.
2. Talk directly to the other person involved in a private setting. Work with the other person to try to solve the issue yourselves.
3. If someone approaches you with an issue, be willing to work on it.
4. If an individual begins to complain to you about another person who is not present, encourage that individual to talk directly with the other person instead. This approach is much more positive and discourages the perpetration of rumors, false information, poor morale, etc.
5. If after you have tried to work on the issue with the other person(s) involved and the conflict still exists, ask for help from your Supervisor.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND BEFORE DEALING WITH A CONFLICT ISSUE

1. **Describe the conflict. Ask yourself:**
 - What is the conflict?
 - With whom?
 - What do we disagree about?
2. **Reflect on how you are feeling and what you want:**
 - How am I feeling? Angry? Rational or irrational?
 - Specifically, what is the other person doing that bothers me?
 - How can I help a person accomplish what needs to be done?
 - What part of this is my fault?
 - How do I generally get along with others?
3. **Reflect on the other person(s).**
 - What is he/she feeling? Angry?
 - What is her/his perspective on the problem?
 - What is he/she likely to want?
 - What is my history of conflict with this person?
 - How does this person get along with others?
 - What do I appreciate about this person?
4. **Consider differences in culture, gender, and family approaches to conflict.**
 - Are there certain cultural norms or approaches that affect how I or another person(s) deal verbally or nonverbally with conflict?
5. **Think about the outcome if final conflict is not addressed, ask:**
 - How important is it to resolve this? To our work relationship? To the organization?
 - How much time and energy will it take?
 - What are the risks of confronting the conflict?
 - What are the possible benefits to our work relationship?

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE WORKING ON AN ISSUE

1. Choose a time and a place carefully. Never initiate a conflict in a public setting or when uninvolved people are present. Be careful about confronting a person when they are dealing with a mistake or loss, after a hard day, or before an event when they have to be at their best, or when working on a deadline. Sensitivity to the other person's circumstances is important in any one-to-one communication. In a conflict it is critical.
2. Consider your mode of communication. In-person, face-to-face communication is important. Avoid using written memos to communicate your concerns. Written communications limit non-verbal expressions, tend to "formalize" positions and cause feelings to be misinterpreted. It can be useful to document the outcome, but try to convey the problem personally.

3. Change behaviors not people. There are two directions you can go when dealing with a conflict. Either you can fix the problem or fix the blame. If you make it a goal to convince the other person that he or she is wrong (or bad) you will accomplish very little. Be hard on the problem and soft on the person.
4. Agree on something. Find the common interest or a basic goal you share with the other person (meeting a deadline, completing a project). This minimizes defensiveness and sets a tone of cooperation and problem solving. You're on the same team!
5. Use "I" language. State your case in terms of your own feelings. For instance, instead of telling someone, "You missed another deadline!" say "I'm frustrated when you don't accomplish your work at the agreed upon time because it affects the timeliness of the entire project Use "I" statements even on minor issues: "I didn't understand what you said" instead of "You didn't explain that clearly." This helps to focus on the facts and avoid personal attacks.
6. Think about where you went wrong... or how you may have contributed to the conflict. It's not easy, but admit your mistake. Doing this often frees up the other person to admit their part in the problem. Starting out a confrontation with "I know that I am partly responsible for this" can go a long way in finding a win-win solution.
7. Focus on interests, not positions. Each of us can be so concerned with our own interests that we pay too little attention to the interests of others. Much conflict can be the result of focusing on one's own issues, conceding as little as possible or looking for victory. Identify your issues as well as the other person's (put yourself in their shoes). Ask "why" they take a certain position or "why not". Communicate your interests. Be specific. Look for meeting common interests in finding the solution.
8. Criticize with precision. A lot of conflict is the result of vague criticism. What is needed is identifying specific behaviors that are unacceptable. If you receive vague feedback, ask for clarification.
9. Take a time out. Giving yourself time is a good rule of thumb in all conflicts, but particularly in highly emotional situations. Time allows emotions to cool, which gives both persons time to move from the blame phase to the solution phase.
10. Agree on the future action. Keep the solution on the specific action that will be taken. By agreeing to a specific course of action instead of good intentions you are demonstrating your commitment to solving the problem and decreasing the chances that it would happen again. Documenting the action helps assure clarity and commitment.

Employee Signature

Date