

7 Steps to Dealing With Conflict at Work

There may be times when you will be involved in a high stake conversation that could lead to some conflict. How I define conflict is when you and the other person are in a discussion where you don't see eye to eye on an issue, and the emotional stakes are high. The trouble with most conflicts is not that they can't be worked out, it's the emotional attachment that we have to a particular point of view, or a method of getting a task done.

The more that we feel strongly about a certain perspective, the more personal we make the issue. What I'm going to address today is how to deal with conflict at work so that both parties can move to a peaceful resolution.

Step 1: Allow yourself to remain calm and realize that most conflicts are rarely ever personal. Keep in mind that you're in a professional environment and you need to maintain your professional image for others to trust you and to be able to keep a productive work environment. But always the first thing is to always be aware of your emotional state that you are in. Our brains think more clearly and thoroughly when we are calm and as relaxed as possible. Creating emotional stress will generally throw away a lot of rational thinking and discussion, and it can be easy to interpret this as personal. By realizing it's not personal, then you can keep a certain emotional distance away.

Step 2: Listen to the issue at hand that is being discussed. During a moment of heated discussion, listening can be one of the last things we want to do, but yet it's one of the most vital actions that need to occur if two people are to work towards a solution. If you're not willing to listen to the other person and their concern, then don't expect the other person to listen. And if you don't fully listen to what the issue is then how are you going to have a full understanding of what the conflict is about?

Step 3: Seek to understand the position that the other person is taking. This can be the tricky part, but most people in conflict resolution really want to be understood and heard. They don't want to be told what is wrong or right. Simply by understanding another person's perspective and paraphrasing what they are trying to communicate to you will relax them tremendously. It's when we feel that we have to be defending our position of being right, that we start to get into conflict. But don't mistaken that when you understand the other person's position that you need to agree and follow their steps and convert with the perspective.

Be curious about what makes them stick to their perspective. You want to ask questions related to the point of view. Why is it that they feel that a certain way is better, and how did they come to that conclusion. By understanding how they came to their conclusion you may gain potential insight into how to solve the conflict at hand.

Step 4: Start to discuss what the larger goal is within the conflict you are trying to solve. Many times conflicts arise, but you need to step and stop looking at the micro situation. You need to ask yourself "What are we both trying to achieve here that is leading to this particular conflict?" The conflict could be about how to split resources for a particular project, and you favour putting resources in one area, while another manager wants to put resources in another. But once you've understood the position of the other person, discuss what the larger goal or commonality that is being accomplished.

Step 5: Stick with the issue at all times. During a conflict it can be easy bring back past failures or "Last time we tried it your way every one almost ended up being fired!" is not going to help. Each conflict is like a math problem, it needs to be looked at individually and addressed. Bringing other information that is not relevant will just anger the other person.

Step 6: Ask the other person if they would be open to discussing potential options to solve the conflict or problem for the greater good of the goal. At this point if you have remained calm, listened and tried to understand their position, and have clarified the ultimate goal for both of you, then now is a good time to present your perspective and let the other person know that you would like their expertise and why.

Step 7: Find out which options do work for both of you that you both will be satisfied with and move towards a clear action. This can be the hardest which is to find that fits both parties. But list out the pros and cons of each perspective, and always calmly discuss on how to proceed towards the solution with actual action steps on both your parts. Dialogue is not the same as creating an actual solution. If the person starts to get angry or hostile again and again, and it's not absolutely urgent, then it's best to encourage to have a meeting another time.

Conflicts don't usually occur as an everyday occurrence in our conversations, but is an important part of professional development. Next time you find yourself in a high stakes conversation in trying to solve a problem, follow the 7 steps and you'll find that managing your conflicts will be much easier and you'll feel in more control.

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Source: <http://businesslightsideas.com>