

Development Suggestions for Conflict Management

Suggested Readings

Title	Author/Publisher	Learning Mode
Resolving Conflicts at Work: A Complete Guide for Everyone on the Job	Cloke, Kenneth and Joan Goldsmith/ 2001/ Jossey-Bass	Book
The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management	Harvey, Jerry B./1996 / Jossey-Bass	Book
Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High	Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler, and Stephen R. Covey/ 2002/ McGraw-Hill	Book + AudioCD
Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success in Work and Life on Conversation at a Time	Scott, Susan./2002/Berkeley Publishing Group	Book

Activities

1. Increase your awareness of how you approach conflict. Keep a journal or diary that lists the disagreements and conflicts you have with other people. Write down the issues, your perception of those issues, how you responded, and your perception of the other person's issues, concerns, and his or her response. Determine if there is a pattern to your response. Use the following responses as guides:
 - Withdrawal – You avoid or withdraw yourself from conflict situations as much as possible.
 - Aggressive – You try to convince the other person(s) that you are right. You insist on having your own way.
 - Agreeable – You defer to the point(s) of view of the other person(s).
 - Collaborative – You work through the issues so that all parties arrive at a mutually satisfying outcome.
2. If you tend to withdraw or are reluctant to address conflict, ask yourself the following questions:
 - What am I concerned about?
 - What is keeping me from dealing directly with the conflict?
 - What do I fear?
 - What can I do to reduce my fears?
 - What are the consequences if I do not deal directly with the conflict?

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3. Focus on the causes of conflict, not the symptoms. Identify the source or root cause of the disagreement or conflict by asking yourself the following questions:
 - Is this conflict a result of differences in **facts** or lack of information?
 - Is this conflict a result of differences in **methods** or procedures?
 - Is this conflict a result of differences in **goals** or priorities?
 - Is this conflict a result of differences in **values**?

Conflicts over facts are the easiest to resolve because information can be shared or reliable data can be obtained. Conflicts over values are the most difficult to resolve.

4. Model effective behavior to help others manage conflict and find mutually acceptable solutions. Consider the following guidelines:
 - Avoid arguing only for your own view.
 - Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose.
 - Do not change your mind just to avoid conflict.
 - Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as majority vote, averages, or coin tosses.
 - Recognize that differences are natural and to be expected.
 - Identify areas of agreement as you go along.
5. Use a systematic process for working through differences. Consider using the two-step process described below.

a. Step 1: Uncover each person's interests.

First, explain what is important to you and why. For example, you might say, "What's important to me is ... because" Second, get the other person's perspective on what is important to him or her and why. For example, you might say, "Tell me what you care about. Why?" Use active listening skills such as paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, and asking facilitative questions.

b. Step 2: Explore alternative solutions that satisfy interests.

Give your ideas and get reactions from the other person. For example, you might say, "How about if we ...? What do you think of that idea?" Next, get the other person's ideas and react to them. For example, you might say, "What do you think we might do?" Ask "what if" questions to lift constraints.

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6. Listen carefully for the two kinds of interests: professional and personal.
 - a. Professional interests are typically easier to talk about and recognize. They include responsibilities at work, the well-being of the organization, and the interests of clients or customers.
 - b. Personal interests are more difficult to uncover. They include one's ego, pride, image, competition, and control. To uncover personal interests, you may need to rely on a person's nonverbal cues and body language. Effective ways to probe for personal interests are to make assumptions and then check to see if you're right. For example, you might say, "What I'm picking up from you is your concern for Am I on the right track?"

Tips

1. Always strive for "win-win" solutions to a problem which focus on the common goal. Seek an outcome that includes some of the items each side desired, allowing both parties to gain.
2. Analyze your conflict management style. Do you avoid dealing with conflict, treat the problem superficially (smoothing), use power, seek compromise, or use confrontation? Learn the confrontation method and when to use it. It considers the cause of the conflict and emphasizes organizational goals over individual ones. It is useful when both parties are willing to participate in the conflict resolution process.
3. Consult with others in the organization whom you respect to gain additional perspectives on the conflict.
4. Deal with the causes of the conflict, not the symptoms.
5. Determine whether the conflict is being caused by differences in goals, competition for resources, failure in communication, misinterpretation of information, disagreement over performance standards, or incongruities in the organizational structure.
6. Engage in active listening to understand precisely what your counterpart's minimum requirement is in order to forge an agreement.
7. Have people on each side of the conflict restate the other side's position using active listening skills.
8. Take time to observe negotiation and conflict resolution processes at work or in community organizations and to analyze the factors that account for the resolution.
9. Talk to your supervisor and peers about your conflict management style. Different organizations or departments may require different styles because of the nature of

their functions.

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10. Try to keep personal emotions out of the conflict; resolve the issues in terms of value added to the organization, regardless of your personal feelings.
11. Try to locate the commonality in positions, rather than the differences.
12. Try to view conflict resolution as an attempt to locate win-win solutions, with an eye toward preserving long-term relationships.