

Company Intranet Blog

Fighting fair – The art of conflict resolution



Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship. It is inevitable, and it is going to happen whenever people have different values and expectations. When conflict is mismanaged, and not resolved quickly, it can cause great harm to work relationships, but when handled in a respectful, positive way, conflict provides an opportunity to strengthen the bond between colleagues. By learning what causes conflict and some skills for conflict resolution, you can keep your professional relationships strong and productive.

What are the causes of conflict?

An important component of conflict resolution involves you knowing how you feel and why you feel the way you do about certain situations. Everyone desires to feel understood, nurtured, and supported, but the ways in which these needs are met can vary widely.

Conflict arises from differences, both large and small, and differing needs can create some of the most severe challenges in our personal and professional relationships. Whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires, conflict occurs. Sometimes these differences appear trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal need is often at the core of the problem. These needs can range from a need to feel safe and secure to a need to feel respected and valued. No matter what the situation, the needs of both parties play very important roles in the long-term success of relationships, and each deserves respect and consideration.

Below are nine common causes of conflict in the workplace.

Conflicting resources - We all need access to certain resources – whether these are office supplies, help from colleagues, or even a meeting room – to do our jobs well. When more than one person or group needs access to a particular resource, conflict can occur.

Conflicting styles - Everyone works differently, according to his or her individual needs and personality. For instance, some people love the thrill of getting things done at the last minute, while others need the structure of strict deadlines to perform. However, when working styles clash, conflict can often occur.

Conflicting perceptions- All of us see the world through our own lens, and differences in perceptions of events can cause conflict, particularly where one person knows something that the other person

doesn't know, but doesn't realize it. A giraffe's perspective will be largely different from that of a snake. Seek to understand as differing perspectives and perceptions can cause conflict.

Conflicting or unclear goals - Sometimes we have conflicting goals in our work. Whenever goals are set for a team or an individual, it is important that those goals don't conflict with other goals set for that person, or team. When goals collide due to unclear communication, misunderstandings and conflict can occur.

Conflicting pressures- We often have to depend on our colleagues to get our work done. Conflicting pressures are similar to conflicting goals; the only difference is that conflicting pressures usually involve urgent tasks, while conflicting goals typically involve projects with longer timelines. Tasks and timelines should be clear to avoid unrealistic expectations and conflict.

Conflicting roles - Sometimes we have to perform a task that's outside our normal role or responsibilities. If this causes us to step into someone else's "territory," then conflict and power struggles can occur. The same can happen in reverse – sometimes we may feel that someone else should complete a particular task; thus making conflicting roles similar to conflicting perceptions. After all, one team member may view a task as his or her responsibility or territory. But when someone else comes in to take over that task, conflict occurs.

Different personal values- When our work conflicts with our personal values, conflict can quickly develop.

Lack of Information - Conflict can arise when one people feel they lack important information. When employees are continually experiencing changes that they were not informed about, or if there are decisions being made that the staff feels it should be involved in, this can bring about conflict between employees and managers.

Unpredictable policies- When rules and policies change at work and changes are not clearly communicated to the team, confusion and conflict can occur. In addition, if failing to apply workplace policies consistently can cause disparity in treatment and can also become a source of dissension.

In workplace conflicts, differing needs are often at the heart of disputes. When you can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens a path to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships.

Tips for resolving conflict

Managing and resolving conflict requires the ability to quickly reduce stress and bring your emotions into balance. You can ensure that the process is as positive as possible by sticking to the following guidelines:

1. **Listen for what is felt as well as what is said.** When we listen we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening also strengthens and informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us when it's our turn to speak.
2. **Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right."** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.
3. **Focus on the present.** If you're holding on to grudges based on past resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
4. **Pick your battles.** Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy.
5. **Be willing to forgive.** Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.
6. **Know when to let something go.** If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.
7. **Say "thank you".** Always thank the other person for listening to your side of the story.