

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Turn Conflict into Collaboration

Conflict is a natural part of life brought on by our different beliefs, experiences and values. If not managed correctly, however, conflict can harm relationships.

In this issue of *Your Source*, you'll find out how to manage and handle conflict in the workplace. So, let's get started. The following are seven steps adults should use to resolve conflict:

- *Treat the other person with respect*—Although respecting the other person during a conflict is challenging, we must try. Words of disrespect stop communication in its tracks and may create wounds that may never heal.
- *Confront the problem*—Find a time and place to discuss the conflict with the other person.
- *Define the conflict*—Describe the conflict in clear, concrete terms. Be specific and start sentences with “I,” not “you.” Focus on behaviors or problems, not people.
- *Communicate understanding*—Listen to really understand the other person's feelings and needs. Step back and try to imagine how the other person sees things.
- *Explore alternative solutions*—Take turns offering alternative solutions. Examine consequences of each solution. Agree on the most workable solution.
- *Evaluate after time*—Determine a way to check on how well the solution is working.

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The answer is B. For all parties to be able to discuss their issues, the manager must acknowledge anxiety of the participants in order to reduce it. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Handling Workplace Conflicts



Which statement is an important part of workplace conflict resolution?

- A. Realizing that resolving conflicts and having difficult conversations are the same.
- B. Acknowledging and reducing anxiety.
- C. Finding positive things to say.
- D. Accepting that some people are just difficult.

Check your answer on the bottom.

Now That's an Idea!

Become an Active Listener—

Despite the increasing use of the Internet, cyberspace and text messaging, listening remains a prized skill. The following can help you become an active listener— invaluable to your managerial role:

- **Show interest:** Focus on the speaker; don't answer your phone or check email.
- **Clarify:** Check your understanding. For example, “It sounds like you're saying that _____. Is that right?”
- **Be patient:** It's not easy for some people to talk about important things.
- **Have empathy:** Listen with your heart as well as your mind.

In the Middle of a Conflict? These Tips Can Help

Like it or not, conflicts are going to happen at work and in our personal lives. When you get into a disagreement, there are many steps you can take to mend the conflict and/or avoid it altogether. Here are some ideas:

- **Talk directly to the person(s) involved**—Assuming there is no threat of physical violence, a one-on-one or private setting is best. Be certain that no one is being misquoted or misinterpreted by using active listening.
- **Choose a good time to talk**—Choosing the right time to talk is important. Allow enough time for a thorough discussion.
- **Plan ahead**—Carefully consider what you want to say ahead of time.
- **Don't blame or name-call**—Antagonizing others will only keep them from hearing or accepting your point.
- **Listen to all sides**—Give everyone a chance to share their view of the conflict completely.
- **Talk it through**—Allow people to discuss their concerns and feelings in a positive way.
- **Brainstorm ideas**—Consider a variety of ideas to help solve the problem. Don't judge the ideas as right or wrong, or good or bad. Look for options that emphasize the common good.
- **Look for win-win solutions**—Try to settle differences in a manner that supports everyone's need for being heard, validated and respected. Evaluate the different options to find an agreement that can work for all parties.
- **Follow through**—Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure the agreement is still working—then do it.

*The key to resolving
a conflict is
communication*

The key to resolving a conflict is communication, and that can't happen if both people are fuming. By communicating calmly, openly and honestly, they can work toward finding a solution that satisfies them both, thus resolving the conflict.

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Three Management Best Practices for Conflict Resolution

1. Realize that things are not black and white.

People are fond of talking in absolutes: "This is what's wrong." "That is the problem." But most conflicts are not so cut and dry nor black and white. As a manager, you need to find the common ground that exists in the shades of gray.

2. Don't let things linger.

Unresolved conflicts rarely get better on their own. Matters just get worse the longer they linger. While it's never fun to deal with workplace conflict, remember that problems are more easily solved when they're handled early on.

3. Let bygones be bygones.

The conflict has been resolved (or so you think). Healthy teams will move on. However, if a team member just can't get past it, you may wish to talk with the person about it or suggest that the person call their program or their human resources department to speak with someone.