

Conflict Resolution Dealing with Difficult People

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Purpose

The workshop will focus on conflict resolution and how you can learn to effectively deal with difficult situations and people.

You will learn how to address conflicts with colleagues in a calm and professional manner and to develop an appropriate approach for breaking down a conflict in order to find a suitable solution.

You will be able to describe the five conflict handling modes and strategies for dealing with conflict situations.

You will learn how to respond to group and individual conflict.

Define Conflict

Conflict can be understood as a process of expressing dissatisfaction, disagreement, or unmet expectations with another person, group, or organization.

1. Conflict usually starts out with some sort of a stressful incident occurring from differences or when people disagree over their values, perceptions, ideas, or desires.
2. The differences may sometimes look trivial; however, when conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal need is at the core of the problem. Such as a need to feel safe & secure, a need to feel respected & valued, or a need for greater closeness and intimacy.
3. If these needs are not met the cycle of conflict continues and may escalate into inappropriate behaviors (yelling, threatening, sarcasm, refusing to speak, people just shut down).
4. You need to control your emotions when you find yourself in the middle of a conflict. How you react to an individual that is being difficult may determine whether the cycle continues or the conflict is resolved.
5. If the conflict is handled ineffectively the results can be damaging and turn to personal dislike, teamwork breakdown, talent wasted as people disengage from their work—
6. Which can easily end up in a vicious circle of negativity.
 - Ending the conflict:
 - 7. However, when you recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships.

Conflict Resolution

- Example: You and a colleague are not effectively working together. OR You believe you are working longer hours than you think is fair. You will need to communicate this to your colleague or boss and attempt to change the situation. You can do this well or you can do this badly:
- Bad approach is to be **passive** (this is where you take the inferior position and emphasize the power of the person. This weak approach is obviously bad for your self-esteem and will mean that you frequently do not get your way. This will particularly become more apparent when you are in meetings where other people apply stronger pressure in the opposite direction. The advantage of this approach is that it seems to minimize any potential conflict arising from a request. By acknowledging the power of the other person you make the granting of your request a “favor” which can be granted or denied irrespective of reason or right.
- Second bad approach is to be **aggressive** (this is where you actively state what you want, and seek to force the other person into giving it to you. This approach can be successful in the short-term particularly where there is no ongoing relationship; however, it can damage long-term relationships severely.
- The best approach is to communicate **assertively** (this is where you ask for what you want clearly and openly and explain rationally why you want it – all without trying to use inappropriate emotional leverage. By negotiating rationally with the other person, you show respect for your working relationship and ensure that you make a fair contribution to the decision making process.
- ***Some Guidelines on Assertive Communication***
- Use “I statements” to focus the conversation on you and not blaming others. Examples:
 - “I feel hurt” rather than “You hurt me”
 - “I don’t agree” rather than “You are wrong”
 - “I feel ignored” rather than “You don’t care”
 - “I am treated unfairly” rather than “You are so unfair”
- Say “No” when you want to mean it. The word “No” is quite powerful, so use it. However, if you want to say “No”, you can also tone it down by offering alternatives. This suggests that you are at least sincere.
 - Deliver your message to the person that matters, not to everyone else but the person.
 - If you don’t understand the other person, ask for clarification.
 - Avoid exaggerations such as “You always...”, “You are...”, “You constantly...”, “You never...”, “You are the most...”. They are never true, so there is no point to state them like that as they will be instantly rejected and the focus of the conversation will change towards them.

LADDER

Six stage process for handling problems assertively

Use the LADDER a six stage process for handling problems assertively: figure out what you are going to say for each stage before doing it:

- *(L)ook* at your rights and what you want, and understand your feelings about the situation– the first stage of the process is to look objectively at the problem. Do what you can to cut away the emotion and try and understand why you feel that your rights are being violated.
- *(A)rrange* a meeting with the other person to discuss the situation – by arranging a formal meeting you show the importance of the situation to you. You also ensure that enough time is allocated to discussing it.
- *(D)efine* the problem specifically – keep the information objective and uncolored by emotion. Make sure your comments are correct and supported by facts.
- *(D)escribe* your feelings so that the other person fully understands how you feel about the situation. – do not attack or blame the other person for the problem. Explain how it affects you.
- *(E)xpress* what you want clearly and concisely – say what you want to happen to resolve the situation. Keep your message short, clear, direct, and unambiguous. Be polite in your expression.
- *(R)einforce* the other person by explaining the mutual benefits of adopting your suggestion. – Show him or her how doing what you want will improve the situation. Be careful in expressing negative consequences as making threats can damage working relationships. However, in some cases the negative consequences may need to be spelled out.

by Martha Davis

The Thomas-Kilman Model

Five Handling Styles

There are five handling-styles of conflict and the Thomas-Kilman model is based on behavior and situations that help identify key competencies needed in dealing with conflict situations.

Competitive: People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations.

Collaborative: People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

Compromising: People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something, and the compromiser him- or herself also expects to relinquish something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming.

Accommodating: This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to collect on this "favor" you gave. However people may not return favors, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes.

Avoiding: People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

Disruptive Behavior in a Group

First, make sure your own house is in order. Has the group made a genuine effort to create a supportive, noncompetitive climate? If not, then refrain from looking for scapegoats to blame for group disharmony and conflict. The problem is you. Get busy and clean up your environment. You can hardly expect others to be supportive and cooperative when you haven't made the effort yourself.

Second, stop wishing that difficult individuals were different. Chronic behaviors have been learned, usually over long periods of time. Change your communication in relation to that person's difficult behavior. Communication in-groups is a transaction operating within a system. What one party does affects the other parties. You may change the troublemaker's behavior toward the group, even though you will not likely change him or her from a difficult person into a likeable one. So how do you act in relation to the difficult member so the problem person becomes less of a disruption? Consider the next step.

Third, try not to encourage the disruption. There are several common ways that groups unwittingly encourage the disrupter. Avoid the following:

- Don't placate the troublemaker.
- Refuse to be goaded into a reciprocal pattern.
- Don't provide a soapbox for the troublemaker.

Fourth, attempt to convert disruption into a constructive contribution.

Fifth, confront the difficult person directly. If the entire group is upset by the behavior of the difficult person, then the group should confront the disrupter. Confrontations, of course, should be descriptive, not evaluative. Even when there is a power disparity, such as when your supervisor in your work group is the difficult person, confrontation is important.

Sixth, separate yourself from the difficult person if all else fails.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, try to understand the complete message being sent.

- **Pay attention.**
Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.
- **Show that you are listening.**
Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
- **Provide feedback.**
 - **Reflect** what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is." and "Sounds like you are saying." are great ways to reflect back.
 - **Ask questions** to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say." "Is this what you mean?"
 - **Summarize** the speaker's comments periodically.
- **Defer judgment.**
Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
- **Respond Appropriately.**
 - Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
 - Assert your opinions respectfully.
 - Treat the other person as you would want to be treated.

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