

GUIDE TO MANAGING CONFLICT

In most conflicts, neither party is right or wrong; instead, different perceptions collide to create disagreement. Conflict is natural and it's up to you to respond to conflict situations quickly and professionally. Conflict can be very positive. Clear and open communication is the cornerstone of successful conflict resolution.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Gain cooperation from team members**
- **Improve performance and productivity**
- **Reduce stress and preserve integrity**
- **Solve problems as quickly as possible**
- **Improve relationships and teamwork**
- **Enhance creativity**
- **Increase staff morale**

RESOLVING CONFLICT SITUATIONS

**TO MANAGE CONFLIT
EFFECTIVELY YOU MUST BE A
SKILLED COMMUNICATOR.**

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT A DIFFICULT SITUATION EXISTS

Honesty and clear communication play an important role in the resolution process. Acquaint yourself with what's happening and be open about the problem.

LET INDIVIDUALS EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

Some feelings of anger and/or hurt usually accompany conflict situations. Before any kind of problem-solving can take place, these emotions should be expressed and acknowledged.

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

What is the stated problem? What is the negative impact on the work or relationships? Are differing personality styles part of the problem? Meet with employees separately at first and question them about the situation.

DETERMINE UNDERLYING NEED

THE GOAL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS NOT TO DECIDE WHICH PERSON IS RIGHT OR WRONG; THE GOAL IS TO REACH A SOLUTION THAT EVERYONE CAN LIVE WITH. LOOKING FIRST FOR NEEDS, RATHER THAN SOLUTIONS, IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR GENERATING WIN/WIN OPTIONS.

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DETERMINE UNDERLYING NEED

TO DISCOVER NEEDS, YOU MUST TRY TO FIND OUT WHY PEOPLE WANT THE SOLUTIONS THEY INITIALLY PROPOSED. ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND THE ADVANTAGES THEIR SOLUTIONS HAVE FOR THEM, YOU HAVE DISCOVERED THEIR NEEDS

FIND COMMON AREAS OF AGREEMENT, NO MATTER HOW SMALL

- o Agree on the problem**
- o Agree on the procedure to follow**
- o Agree on worst fears**
- o Agree on some small change to give an experience of success**

FIND SOLUTIONS TO SATISFY NEEDS

- o Problem-solve by generating multiple alternatives**
- o Determine which actions will be taken**
- o Make sure involved parties buy into actions. (Total silence may be a sign of passive resistance.) Be sure you get real agreement from everyone.**

DETERMINE FOLLOW-UP YOU WILL TAKE TO MONITOR ACTIONS

You may want to schedule a follow-up meeting in about two weeks to determine how the parties are doing.

DETERMINE WHAT YOU'LL DO IF THE CONFLICT GOES UNRESOLVED

If the conflict is causing a disruption in the department and it remains unresolved, you may need to explore other avenues. An outside facilitator (such as the Staff Ombuds Office) may be able to offer other insights on solving the problem.

DEALING WITH ANGER

To effectively defuse anger, keep in mind the needs of the angry speaker:

- **To vent. An angry person needs to let off steam and release the anger that may have been brewing for a long time use your communication skills to allow the person to do this.**

TO GET THE LISTENER'S ATTENTION

An angry person wants to know that you are paying attention use your body language to show this.

TO BE HEARD

An angry person wants someone to listen to her point of view acknowledge the feelings you hear so that the speaker knows you appreciate how angry she is.

TO BE UNDERSTOOD

An angry person wants someone to appreciate how she feels try to empathize with her experience so that she feels you understand the situation, and acknowledge her right to feel the way she does.

WHEN YOU'RE LISTENING TO AN ANGRY PERSON

- **Be attentive and patient.** Keep in mind that she will become less angry as you let her express herself.
- **Be sincere.** Empathy and validation must be both honest and genuine.

BE CALM

Try to remove your own emotions from the discussion. Remember that an angry person may say inflammatory things in the heat of the moment, but you do not have to react angrily.