

Session 11 – Conflict Resolution Handout

Conflict Resolution

Disagreements are inevitable. Sometimes they turn into conflict. Its best to talk about the disagreement before it becomes a conflict. Often the disagreement is a misunderstanding and restating the other person's position can resolve the disagreement. Speak up. Politely, but firmly, say that you don't want to do your co-worker's extra work, or tell whatever else is on your mind. You may not get a positive response at first, but you may. And you'll also get the benefit of speaking your mind, and will at least get the message out there for everyone's consideration.

If the problems don't affect you too strongly, you may choose to get better at ignoring them. This may seem difficult at first, but there's something to be said for choosing your battles. Not everything can be ignored, but by focusing on positives of the job, some problems can bother you much less than you would think.

When you do discuss the issue, you need to stay focused on the present during this talk and not bring up other disagreements or behavior. Bringing up too many topics clouds the issue. The goal is to achieve a more positive outcome for the immediate situation. You should make sure you:

- Listen carefully.
- Are able to restate the other person's statements in your own words.
- Focus on understanding instead of thinking about what you are going to say next.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't get defensive.

It's vital to understand the other person's perspective, rather than just our own, if you are to resolve the situation. Good listening helps you to be able to bridge the gap between the two of you and understand where the disconnect lies. Just listen and restate the other view so he knows you've heard his position. You will understand better and your co-worker will be more willing to listen to you.

Effective communication involves admitting when you're wrong. Realize that personal responsibility is strength, not a weakness. You both share some responsibility in a conflict. Look for and admit to what's yours. It diffuses the situation, sets a good example, and shows you're willing to work for a compromise. It also often inspires the other person to accept some responsibility, leading you both closer to a better understanding and potential solution.

Use "I" **Messages:** Instead of saying, "*You* really need to be more careful," begin statements with "I", and make them about yourself and your feelings, like, "I can't finish my work on time when this happens." It's less likely to make the other person feel defensive, and helps the other person understand your point of view instead of feeling attacked.

Look for Compromise: Don't just try to win the argument, look for solutions that satisfy everybody. Compromise or find a new solution that gives you both what you want most. You might not get everything you want, but the situation will be better. This approach works well than one person getting what they want when the other gets nothing.

Take a Time-Out: Don't wait for tempers to get heated to the point the discussion becomes an argument or a fight. If you find yourself or your co-worker starting to get too angry to be constructive, take a break to cool off. Sometimes good communication means knowing when to take a break. Even when you take a break come back to the discussion. You can't just let the situation simmer because you don't communicate.

Ask For Help If You Need It: If you can't resolve the situation, you might need to get your supervisor involved. Remember to stick to the facts, avoiding criticism and accusations. Use all the above guidance when talking with the boss about a conflict with your co-worker. Remember that the goal of conflict resolution should be mutual understanding and finding a solution that pleases both parties, not "winning" the argument or "being right."

Resolving Conflict with the Boss

When resolving conflict with your boss, you need to take a few extra steps to prepare for the discussion. Your supervisor is not your equal and must be approached with more respect.

Organize your thoughts, focusing on facts and behaviors and your perception. Practice what you will say to make sure you will be tactful and avoid words that can be interpreted as attacking, defensive, or critical.

Your boss is busy. Wait for a free moment and ask if you could arrange a time to talk about an important issue. The boss might not have time available during the day and you might need to meet before or after work. Remember to be willing to meet at a time convenient for the boss.

When you meet with your boss calmly and clearly use the carefully chosen words you have rehearsed. Don't be angry, sarcastic, accusatory or critical and stick to the facts you can prove. Don't mention names unless the co-worker is directly involved in the issue. If you have suggestions for change, make sure your arguments include benefits to the crew and the company, not just benefits for yourself.

Once you've presented your case, answer any questions the boss may have and give him or her the time to consider your points. The boss will make a decision and it will be the right one for the team and the company. It might not be what you want, but the boss must take into account the effect on the crew and the company. The boss did not get that position by making wrong decisions and you must respect and carry out the boss' decision.

Assertiveness

Tell the person what is bothering you. The other person may not realize the behavior offends you. You need to state your position as the first step in finding a mutual way of working together in a productive environment. Focus on the behavior, not the person.

Change what you can. Accept what you can't. Have the wisdom to know the difference.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and while respecting the feelings and rights of others. Assertive communication is appropriately direct, open and honest, and clarifies your needs to the other person. Assertiveness comes naturally to some, but is a skill that can be learned. Assertive people are able to greatly reduce the level of conflict in their lives.

The difference between aggressiveness and assertiveness is that individuals behaving assertively will express themselves in ways doing not offend the other person. They assume the best about people, respect themselves, and try to compromise. In contrast, individuals behaving aggressively will tend to use words that are disrespectful, manipulative, demeaning, or abusive. They win at the expense of others, and create unnecessary conflict.

Passive individuals, on the other hand, are unable to state how they feel. They often fear conflict so much that they don't share their feelings in order to "keep the peace." They let others win while they lose out. This often leads to resentment and reduced cooperation, negatively affecting the workplace. Passive people need to learn to be assertive to improve the effectiveness of the team.

Here's a scenario to illustrate the differences.

Someone cuts in front of you at the supermarket. An aggressive response would be to assume they did it on purpose and angrily say, "Hey, jerk, no cuts!" A passive response would be to just let the person stay in front of you and say nothing.

An assertive response would be to assume that they may not have seen you in line, and politely say, "Excuse me, but I was in line."

Learn where you are on the assertiveness spectrum, know where you want to be, read more on assertiveness training, and develop a win-win mentality to become more assertive.

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