



Conflict Resolution

Helping Your Team Work
Through Disputes

Introduction

“Whenever you’re in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.”

—William James

This training focuses on ways that you, as supervisors, can work with your employees to resolve conflict in the workplace. It provides practical steps and techniques that everyone can learn.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide you with the knowledge to recognize causes of workplace conflict, how to facilitate resolution of conflict and how to manage the work relationships once the conflict has been resolved.

Causes of Workplace Conflict

Conflict arises because employees:

- Have different points of view.
- Communicate with one another differently.
- Spend large amounts of time together.
- Depend on one another to “get the job done.”
- Have established expectations of one another that are not communicated and then not met.

Conflict does not always have to be negative. When employees are able to challenge one another's ideas in a supportive environment, new ideas are generated and fostered.

It is important to remember that conflict will always exist between employees. Effective supervisors have the skills to manage the conflict process and turn disagreements into ideas.

Causes of Workplace Conflict: Healthy vs. Unhealthy

Healthy Conflict

- ▶ Disagreements communicated in a supportive environment that foster the generation of new ideas or ways to problem-solve.
- ▶ Tension that increases awareness or sheds light on a growing workplace problem.

Unhealthy Conflict

Damaging conflict:

- ▶ Name calling.
- ▶ Personal attacks.
- ▶ Employees becoming silent, withdrawn and/or afraid to speak up.
- ▶ Cliques, gossip and rumors.
- ▶ Lack of mutual respect.

Importance of Resolving Conflict

Why should we get involved? It's their problem, right?

No—you, as supervisors, must learn to manage conflicts among your team members so that the business continues to run effectively and objectives are met.

Consequences of letting conflict fester:

- Employees not involved in the conflict either “pile on” or withdraw from the conflict.
- Employees take sides or “check out” from work entirely.
- Morale and productivity are lowered because employees are focused on the conflict.
- Employees who work in teams are now divided because of the conflict.

Importance of Resolving Conflict (cont.)

In extreme instances, unresolved conflict can lead to violent or aggressive situations.

- Employees may become injured.
- The company may have legal risks associated with violent situations in the workplace.
- Work can slow dramatically or halt altogether.

Additionally, some cases of conflict can cause those who are being opposed to feel as if it is due to something else, perhaps a protected class, which can lead to accusations of discrimination.

Methods of Resolving Conflict

There are five basic ways of handling conflict in the workplace:

- Competing
- Collaborating
- Compromising
- Avoiding
- Accommodating

There is no one way to resolve a conflict, and often managers need to use multiple methods to reach a resolution.

Methods of Resolving Conflict (cont.)

Competing

The competing method involves handling the conflict through unilateral decision-making. This approach is most appropriately used by managers and leaders in the workplace.

The competing method is used primarily for:

- Situations that involve quick action.
- Instances in which there is no compromise or debate.
- Situations requiring the need to make hard or unpopular decisions.

Methods of Resolving Conflict (cont.)

Collaborating

The collaborating method involves handling the conflict through team input. This technique is particularly useful if all parties in the conflict want to find a resolution but are unable to agree on what the resolution should be.

The collaborating method is used primarily for:

- Gaining support from the team.
- Using the different perspectives as an opportunity to learn.
- Improving relationships through collaboration.

Methods of Resolving Conflict (cont.)

Compromising

The compromising method involves handling the conflict by reaching a resolution that involves a “win” on both sides of the table.

The compromising method is used primarily for:

- Resolving issues of moderate to high importance.
- Finding a solution that involves equal power and strong commitment on both sides.
- Situations needing a temporary fix.
- Backing up a decision that was made using the competing or collaboration methods.

Methods of Resolving Conflict (cont.)

Avoiding

The avoiding method is a way of handling conflict by making an active decision *not* to handle the conflict. This approach is best used for situations that are not related to work and that should be solved through another means.

The avoiding method is used primarily for:

- Unimportant or nonwork-related issues.
- Buying time until a resolution can be reached.
- Recognizing issues as symptoms.

Methods of Resolving Conflict (cont.)

Accommodating

The accommodating method is a way of handling conflict by allowing the other side to “win.”

The accommodating method is used primarily for:

- Maintaining perspective in a conflict situation.
- Making active decisions on what can be “let go” vs. what needs another method.
- Keeping the peace and creating goodwill.

Do's and Don'ts of Resolving Conflict

Do:

- Understand that conflicts are inevitable.
- Resolve to address conflict quickly.
- Focus on the problem.
- Be open to solutions.
- Acknowledge how employees are feeling.
- Listen actively.

Don't:

- Focus on personality traits that cannot be changed.
- Interrupt.
- Attack.
- Disregard the feelings of employees.
- Avoid the conflict.
- Allow emotions to take over the conversation.
- Impose personal values or beliefs.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process

There are six steps to the conflict resolution process:

1. Clarify what the disagreement is.
2. Establish a common goal for both parties.
3. Discuss ways to meet the common goal.
4. Determine the barriers to the common goal.
5. Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict.
6. Acknowledge the agreed solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution.

This process should be completed by *all* parties in the conflict together.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process (cont.)

Step 1: Clarify what the disagreement is

Clarifying involves getting to the heart of the conflict. The goal of this step is to get both sides to agree on what the disagreement is.

Tips:

- Discuss what needs are not being met on both sides of the conflict. Ensure mutual understanding.
- Obtain as much information as possible on each side's point of view.
- Continue to ask questions until you are certain that you, and each side of the conflict, understand the issue.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process (cont.)

Step 2: Establish a common goal for both parties

In this step of the process, both sides agree on the desired outcome of the conflict.

Tips:

- Discuss what each party would like to see happen.
- Find a commonality in both sides as a starting point for a shared outcome. That commonality can be as simple as “both sides want to end the conflict.”

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process (cont.)

Step 3: Discuss ways to meet the common goal

Both sides work together to discuss ways that they can meet the goal they agreed on in step 2.

Tips:

- Brainstorm different approaches to meet the goal.
- Discuss until all the options are exhausted.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process (cont.)

Step 4: Determine the barriers to the common goal

In this step of the process, the two parties acknowledge what has brought them into the conflict.

Tips:

- Ask, “If we could have the outcome that we both wanted, how would that look?”
- Define what can and cannot be changed about the situation.
- For the items that cannot be changed, discuss ways of getting around those roadblocks.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process (cont.)

Step 5: Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict.

Both parties come to a conclusion on the best resolution.

Tips:

- Determine a solution that both sides can live with.
- Discuss the responsibility each party has in maintaining the solution.
- Settle on a means of ensuring that this conflict does not arise again.

Steps in the Conflict Resolution Process (cont.)

Step 6: Acknowledge the agreed solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution

Both sides own their responsibility in the resolution of the conflict and express aloud what they have agreed to.

Tips:

- Get both parties to acknowledge a win-win situation.
- Ask both parties to use phrases such as “I agree to . . .” and “I acknowledge that I have responsibility for . . .”

Summary

Conflict is inevitable in the workplace. There is healthy and damaging conflict.

It is important to address conflict because unresolved conflict leads to low morale, productivity and, in extreme cases, workplace violence.

The five methods of resolving conflict are:

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