



Tips for Managing Conflict at Work

- Define acceptable behavior. With clear standards, everyone knows what is expected. This alone can mitigate or avoid a conflict.
- Don't avoid conflict. Telling yourself it doesn't matter, didn't happen, or you just won't let it bother you is not going to make it go away. When you avoid conflict, it gets bigger and harder to manage.
- Choose a neutral location so that both sides feel comfortable. Moving to a neutral location helps to reduce the threat level.
- Start with a compliment. This will help avoid jumping in with an accusatory tone.
- Use active listening to encourage the other party to share their perspective. Let the other party explain themselves, uninterrupted. This will give you more information with which to work out an appropriate positive outcome.
- Don't get defensive because if you do, the other party will get the message that you aren't listening. If they believe you are not going to listen, the logical response for them is to simply stop talking. It's hard not to take things personally but if you can separate yourself from conflict, it will be easier to see opportunities for resolution.
- Don't jump to conclusions or point fingers. Your understanding of the situation may not have all the information. Blaming is not only disrespectful and destroys a sense of safety. It will also increase the other party's motivation to stand their ground.
- Increase your emotional intelligence so you can recognize the other person's emotions and eliminate frustration and anger.
- Use "I" statements. This avoids blaming. Instead of making the argument about what you don't like about the opposing party, "I" statements make it about emotions, opinions, and personal beliefs. This is much less likely to create defensiveness in the other party.
- Be patient in the conversation, it might take several conversations to come to a good outcome.
- Stay focused on the issue at hand and don't allow yourself to be side-tracked by other issues. Bringing up old issues or piling on will distract from the issue at hand and provoke defensiveness in the other party. If there is more than one issue to be dealt with, have more than one conversation.

- Don't intimidate; forcing an outcome will ultimately result in resentment and, often, the infamous "passive-aggressive" behavior people love to complain about.
- Maintain a positive attitude about conflict; conflict can be an opportunity for positive change.
- Maintain calmness in the conversation. When anger or frustration enter the situation, the fight or flight response kicks in and the quality of your thinking slips. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. If you are exhibiting any signs of heightened emotions, it can trigger the other party to also become agitated and then a downward spiral into dysfunction is almost inevitable.
- Be willing to compromise or collaborate. Put your pride on hold and focus on what you really want! As Dr. Phil often asks his guests, "Do you want to be a right-fighter, or do you want to resolve the issue?" If you are not able to compromise or collaborate, there is no reason for the other party to adjust, either.
- Create an open line of communication so that both parties are comfortable checking in to ensure the other is living up to agreements.
- Say what you need to say to the "right" person. If you have a concern, talk to the other party directly. Don't talk behind that party's back. It feels good to present your case to a sympathetic ear and perhaps create some allies, but when you do that, the dispute will simply grow larger and, in the process, you will destroy the trust of the other party.
- Watch the non-verbals, both yours and the other persons. Rolling your eyes, crossing your arms, turning your head, waving a hand, or many other gestures, can signal aggression to the other party. By the same token, watching for signs that the other party is becoming agitated can be a signal to you. If you see increased agitation and you want the conversation to be productive, you will need to make an adjustment to your tone, your body-language, or your words. If you don't, things are going to get much worse!
- Apologize when you know that you have wronged the other party, even if it was unintentional. It's hard to say, "I'm sorry," especially if a part of you feels that you were right about at least some of the situations. But a genuine apology can go a long way towards de-escalating a situation.
- Effectively managing a conflict is NOT about winning, proving you're right, blaming or punishing. If you want to resolve a conflict, you must focus on understanding, learning, and finding a win-win.

“In a relationship, if one party loses, no one can win.”

Dr. M. Paula Daoust

 DrPaula@behaviortransitions.com

 785-633-6078

 www.behaviortransitions.com