

Five Quick Tips For Resolving Conflicts¹

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(February 17, 2011)

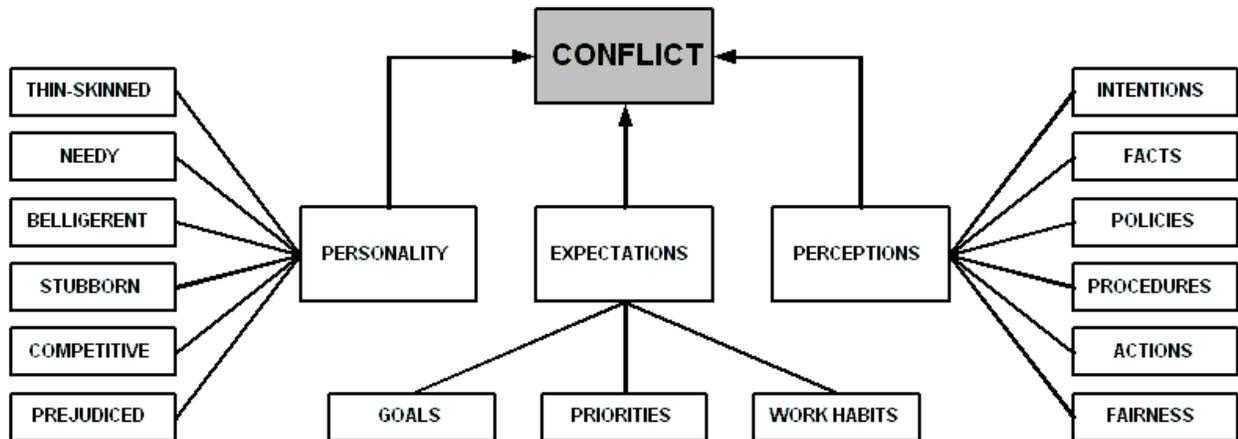


While watching a TV drama last night, I was struck by how much the storyline was based on *conflict*. I thought about how conflict is all around us. Television news programs are filled with conflict—constantly presenting discussions of conflicting opinions, conflicting countries, conflicting religions. Movies portray conflict. Novels thrive on conflict. It seems that most of life revolves around conflict of one kind or another—of one intensity or another. And, certainly, the workplace is no exception.

Conflict is a naturally occurring event in the workplace. Organizations are made up of a variety of people, each different from the other. Every person has his or her own unique needs, goals, priorities, expectations of others, perceptions about work, self-concepts, views of events, and so on. This makes for a complex web of differences—some large and some small, some important and some insignificant.

On the upside, the rich assortment of ideas stemming from these individual differences frequently contributes to innovative, high quality, customer-satisfying performance. On the downside, however, they unfortunately often lead to interpersonal conflicts—conflicts that need resolution so they don't impede the quality of work.

There are many causes of conflicts—far too numerous to describe in this brief little Timely Tip. Following is just a small sample of possible differences that lie at the root of workplace conflicts.



The key to conflict resolution is to handle conflicts without you or the conflicting parties being clouded by anger, without being determined to find someone to blame and punish, and without being biased by grudges one may hold. The goal of any conflict resolution is to see the conflict as a problem to be solved and then to engage the parties involved in the conflict in a collaborative effort to find a mutually satisfying solution to the problem.

¹ From: http://www.arniedahlke.com/110217_Five_Quick_Tips_For_Resolving_Conflicts.pdf

You could be facing conflict in two situations: as a mediator or as a participant. Following are some useful guidelines to follow when we find ourselves faced with either situation:

1. See Conflict Resolution As The Ultimate Goal



As both a mediator and a participant, see conflict as the coming together of two people who are each differently viewing whatever is happening, viewing it from his or her own perspective. The goal is not to “win” the dispute. The goal is reach a place of understanding, in which both people collaborate to resolve the conflict in a win-win fashion or both fully accept, without reservation or criticism, that the participants genuinely differ in their approaches or points of view.

As a participant, be willing to compromise with the other person. Nothing is more important in conflict resolution than the ability to compromise. Distinguish between standing on principle and just being stubborn. Don't let stubbornness block a resolution.

2. Be Prepared At The Start



As a mediator, make sure you gather enough information beforehand, *before* you meet with the conflicting parties. Gather the facts. Know what you're getting into before you schedule a session with them.

As a participant, don't allow yourself to be controlled by your emotions. Keep yourself in a logical, problem-solving state of mind. Nothing will hinder your attempts at resolving a conflict more than you being critical or angry. And, make sure you have your facts straight before you attempt to resolve the conflict.

3. Practice Effective Communication



As a mediator, help the conflicting parties actively listen to each other. Help them focus on the facts and the problem, not on each other. Discourage them from finger-pointing and blaming. Keep your focus on solving the problem. Remember, the problem is the problem, not the people.

As a participant, be sure to communicate as clearly, directly, and openly as possible. Make sure you aren't expecting the other person to “read your mind” and don't try to read his or her mind. Use the tools of active listening, such as paraphrasing what the other person has said to make certain you are understanding him or her. Make sure you thoroughly understand the other person's feelings, assumptions, and assertions.

4. Look For Solutions



As a mediator, ask each person to suggest solutions to the conflict. Emphasize that this is a collaborative effort. If they are unable to do so, or if their solutions are impractical, help them out with ideas of your own.

As a participant, suggest solutions and encourage the other person to do the same. Be open to the other person's suggestions. If you don't agree with a suggestion, explain why and search for a modification or another solution.

5. Review Your Agreed-Upon Solutions



As a mediator, once a solution has been reached, ask each person to restate what he or she has agreed to do in order to eliminate any further misunderstandings and to cement the agreement.

As a participant, once a solution has been reached, work with the other person to review each of your perceptions of the solution you've both agreed to in order to make sure you both understand it the same way

As you can see, successful conflict resolution focuses on the conflict as a problem to be solved, not on finding fault and blaming.

The more conflicting parties learn to collaborate on developing a solution when a conflict occurs, the more likely it is that they will quickly solve any future conflicts that occur.