



Unit -1

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS

Staff Training Solutions

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize how your own attitudes and actions affect others.
- ✓ Find new and effective techniques for dealing with difficult people.

Unit 1

Understanding Conflicts

Conflict as Communication

Defining Conflict

Understanding Conflict

Conflict is a very normal part of healthy relationships. It's not possible for everyone to agree about everything all the time, and to do so can squash creativity and innovation. What is important, then, is to learn how to manage disagreements so that they do not harm relationships. By learning skills to manage conflict, you can approach disagreements with confidence that keeps your personal and professional relationships strong.

Another way to look at dealing with difficult people is to realize that we need to have conversations about accountability. If you consider that holding people accountable (i.e., they are taking responsibility for their actions and results) is a part of your role as a supervisor or at home as a spouse or parent, then these conversations are a part of life. Holding people accountable may or may not become a confrontation, but it is necessary nonetheless. If we avoid these sometimes difficult conversations because we do not like them, consider for a moment whether or not you are valuing that person as a contributor at work or home. If you value them, you are more likely to have these conversations because of your respect for the other individual. We also have to have these conversations with people we do not like for the same reasons.

When you are dealing with difficult people whom you also do not like (we all have people who can rub us the wrong way!), we have an important tip for you before you enter that important conversation. Find something that you like about that person, and you will be able to frame the conversation positively. It doesn't matter what the positive attribute is: they offer good insight in meetings, they are always on time, they meet deadlines, they bring great lunches... just find SOMETHING that you can connect to positively. We guarantee that your conversation will be less likely to get off track and become difficult.

Do We Have To Fight?

People want to be understood and supported. Some of them also want to be nurtured as they progress through life and along their career path. Conflict arises from the differences between people; it flares up when people disagree over something related to their values, motivation, and perception of things or their ideas. From the outside, these differences can look insignificant, but from the inside (or the

perspective of the people involved in the conflict) the issues that are at the core of the problem can trigger strong emotions and are very significant.

If you consider the conflicting need for safety versus the desire to challenge and take risks (a frequent conflict between young children and their parents), the conflict becomes readily apparent. The child wants to explore and so the need to move as quickly as possible on stairs becomes their focus. The parent is responsible for the child's safety, so they limit the child's access to the staircase. This limited access becomes the conflict, as the child wants to explore, and the parent wants to avoid bruises and broken bones.

Whether at home or in the workplace, we have to consider that both parties' needs play an important role in the success of the relationship. Each side deserves respect and consideration. A lack of understanding can contribute to arguments, low productivity, and continued disputes. This in turn can lead to the total breakdown of important relationships.

When you acknowledge the legitimacy of conflict and are willing to examine issues in a cooperative environment, you can open the door to creative problem solving, more cohesive teams, and improved relationships. Developing a method to cope and work through conflict empowers people to take control of the outcomes and to contribute strongly to effective teams.

What is A Conflict?

- ✓ A conflict is more than just a disagreement. A conflict comes with a threat, and whether the threat is real or not, it must be dealt with in order for the threatened party to be able to move beyond the situation.
- ✓ Conflicts become more serious when they are ignored. Since conflicts involve a perceived threat to our own well-being, they stay with us and often become greater in magnitude until we resolve them.
- ✓ Perception colors our reactions and triggers emotions. This makes it difficult for us to remain objective, even when we look at the facts. Our perception is influenced by our life experiences, values, and beliefs.
- ✓ Conflicts trigger our emotional hot buttons. We aren't always at our best when working through conflict because our emotions can interfere with our ability to remain objective and manage things rationally. Learning how to manage conflict during emotionally stable periods helps us to manage conflict more effectively.
- ✓ Conflict brings growth. Although we aren't often able to acknowledge it in the heat of things, when we resolve conflict in our relationships, we are also building trust. In relationships with high levels of trust, we feel more secure, knowing that our relationship will survive, and ultimately get even stronger.

How About Avoidance?

You may think that avoidance is a great way to handle conflict, and we would agree that it is one way to deal with difficult situations. At the same time, consider what happens if you create a policy or procedure at work that no one follows, and you don't want to get into a conflict, so you avoid dealing with it.

On the other hand, you may be in a situation where you feel threatened or somehow unsafe, or you decide that the relationship is not one that you want to foster, and then walk away. You can reschedule the conversation when everyone's temper has been restored, or you can choose to get some help (e.g., through mediation, your manager, or an HR specialist) with the situation.

Self-Assessment

This assessment will help you to determine your preferences for involvement in dealing with difficult people, and taking on those challenging conversations. Answer each question with yes or no. Scoring directions follow the assessment.

Questionnaire

	Yes	No
1. Instead of getting into an argument, I put off certain discussions.		
2. When someone doesn't deliver on a promise, I judge them more quickly than I should.		
3. Sometimes I bring up difficult subjects in a way that makes people defensive.		
4. Let's be honest: there are people I deal with who simply cannot be motivated.		
5. When someone is struggling, I tend to offer advice, even though they may just want to have someone listen to their ideas.		
6. When discussing problems, I sometimes get sidetracked and miss the actual problem.		
7. There are some people I simply cannot work with.		
8. Sometimes it's not them being difficult, it's me.		
9. I prefer to just jump in and have the conversation, rather than spending a lot of time planning for it.		

10. I know that I have to have these conversations, but I do not have to like them.		
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Scoring

Add up the number of times you answered “yes.” **Write that number here:** _____.

Now, have a look at the explanations below.

- ✓ **7-10:** This course is perfect for you. Don’t let your attention wander!
- ✓ **4-6:** You’re in the right place for help, and you’re going to learn some things.
- ✓ **1-3:** You’re managing well and likely successful in dealing with difficult people.
- ✓ **0:** You ought to be teaching this course! Hopefully you’ll find a few helpful gems to enrich your relationship building.

Benefits of Confrontation

To Talk or Not to Talk

If this relationship is important to you, then it makes sense that the conversation takes place. But not every conversation is necessary. Is it worth tracking someone down and having a confrontation when they cut you off in traffic? The person who interrupts you in a meeting but has never done so before, and probably never would again?

Determining Your Involvement

In order to decide whether you need to deal with a difficult person or not, ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ Is this person important to me?
- ✓ Is this relationship important to me?
- ✓ Has this happened before?
- ✓ Does this bother me or other people?
- ✓ Can I invest my time?

If you answer “no” to any of the five questions, we recommend that you remove yourself from the situation, either temporarily or permanently.

Preventing Problems

Overview

The Importance of Empathy

We can do a lot to keep problems from happening in the first place. If you develop your empathizing skills, you can put yourself in the other person's shoes even though you do not have to agree with them. If you are practicing being empathetic (and we recommend that you do) you should avoid phrases like, "I agree" or, "Yes, that's true." Don't reinforce a concern, either. You can simply express your empathy by rephrasing the key topic of the person's statement.

Some phrases you might use include:

- ✓ "I hear..."
- ✓ "I understand..."
- ✓ "I think you're saying..."

The concept of rephrasing before answering gives you:

- ✓ A chance to empathize with the concerns
- ✓ An opportunity to show the person that you understand the concern
- ✓ A moment to think of an appropriate response

It's also important to check to be sure the individual is satisfied with your level of understanding or your explanation. Your ability to empathize will play an important role in your overall communication skills and your ability to foster a positive and productive environment.

Dangerous Misconceptions

Although we believe that we are being clear when we speak, we're not always being as efficient as we think. Here are some important misconceptions for you to keep in mind when you are having a conversation:

- ✓ People always pay attention when you are speaking to them.
- ✓ When people say they are paying attention, they really are.
- ✓ When someone says "I know", they really do.
- ✓ Saying something over and over will ensure that your listener understands.
- ✓ Saying something over and over, slowly or loudly, will be even more effective.

Getting Focused

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Despite our best efforts and our good use of management techniques, our attempts can seem to be for nothing. Behaviors we thought we had influenced positively (or corrected altogether) can regress.

For example, you might have spoken with an employee about some below-par behavior: perhaps they are always late for work, despite the fact that they are supposed to be answering phones and greeting visitors promptly at 9:00 a.m. You've spoken with the employee, and although this will lead to improved behavior for a few days, he always slips back to being late. You've asked your human resources consultant to suspend the employee, and they have indicated that punishment is too harsh, despite your record keeping that shows how often and how bad this behavior is.

You've been braver than plenty of workplace leaders because you have discussed the problem with the employee and with HR. But somehow, the behavior continues, and you get a sense that you are not doing enough.

What's

Missing?

You aren't getting to the heart of the problem. It's not enough to tell the individual that they are breaking the rules, or that a colleague has to cover their tasks when they are late. If it were enough, the behavior would stop.

Ask yourself what is really bothering you to get at what is really bothering *them*. Often the behavior touches a nerve that is much more personal. For example, if I hired the receptionist because he was the son of a friend, and I felt that he was taking advantage of my relationship with him and his parents by not caring about the schedule, that's at a much deeper level than just the rules that are being broken.

If the person is perpetually late because they do not set their alarm (and get up to it) because they really do not care about their job, or they feel underutilized, or they are being bullied by a co-worker and cannot drag themselves into the office, then we are getting at the root of the real problem.

If, as leaders, we are content to only deal with the surface issues, and we are afraid to dig and get at the deeper issues, we will not create a better workplace. We simply scrape the moss off of the surface, only to have it to grow back later.

The ability to peel an infraction back to its core takes patience and precision. Sometimes we don't do this because it can take time to uncover the real problem. We can often find ourselves in too much of a hurry

to do this properly. At other times, our emotions get involved and we make the decision that we really don't want to go there, because we'll also have to deal with what is bothering us.

If you don't stop to think about the big picture, you'll end up either missing the problem, or going after too many problems at once. To stop yourself from being over-involved, you must be able to state the problem in a single sentence. If you make it longer, your conversation will lose focus as soon as it starts.

The Three F's

To get to the heart of the problem, evaluate the 3 F's: **facts, frequency, and frustrated relationship.**

Facts

What are the facts of the issue? Create a list so that you do not get sidetracked while you plan your conversation. Don't drag in other stories or unrelated issues that have happened previously. If you are talking to someone about tardiness, then stick to that and leave things like poor report writing, gossiping, or not taking care of equipment out of the conversation.

Frequency

Make sure you have a very clear history of the frequency of the issue. In this case, how often is the individual late? How late are they?

Describe the pattern like this: "This is the second time that I've called this to your attention. You agreed it would not happen again. Now I am concerned that I cannot trust you to keep a promise."

Revealing that you notice a pattern brings the history to the forefront. The history is important because repeated frequency erodes your trust.

Frustrated Relationship

If your real concern is about the relationship, but you only focus on the pattern, then you are not likely to get the change that you are aiming for. You have to discuss what is important to you in terms of the relationship. Explain that when they repeatedly ignore your expectations to be on time, they aren't just demonstrating a lack of commitment to the job. They are eroding your trust in them, your trust in their ability to do their job, and the possibility of being trusted with assignments in the future.

Comments like the following can be helpful:

- ✓ I feel like I cannot trust you to get the work done.
- ✓ I feel like I am constantly nagging you and I don't like to do that.
- ✓ I feel like I can't trust you to keep the commitments you make.

Further Reading:

