

Conflict: Learn the Signs, Signals and Responses

Conflict is a normal part of any relationship and knowing its signs, signals and interventions is a good start in learning to manage conflict in a productive manner. When we deny, minimize or try to blame our way out of conflict, we simply make it a recurring issue that negatively affects the entire team. Here's your opportunity to gain more skills and competence in dealing more effectively with conflict when it rears its inevitable head on your team.

Signs and symptoms of Conflict:

Do any of these apply to you?

- Endless arguing, complaining and grumbling
- Destructive criticism
- Feelings of helplessness and frustration
- Avoidance patterns
- Loud arguments, threats and (worst case scenarios) violence

H.A.L.T: *(a handy self-assessment tool):*

How do I feel?

- H:** hungry
- A:** anxious
- L:** lonely
- T:** tired

Losing Control of Your Emotions: What are the Signs?

- Low level of anger: annoyed, irritated, bothered
- Medium level of anger: mad, feeling "pissed-off"
- Extremely high level of anger: feeling enraged, hateful, boiling point

Personal Interventions: Take Personal Responsibility

- Keep your mind and heart open: be mindful of negative interpretations, for they may be incorrect and counter-productive
- Use empathy: put yourself into another person's shoes to better understand what was said and how it was said
- Minimize obsessional and paranoid thoughts: allow yourself to just listen to other person; breath and stay present throughout the interaction
- Slow down to avoid impulsive judgments, because they may be misguided, wrong and only add to the conflict.

Preparation to Face Conflict:

Good Faith Conflict Principles for a Team Environment

1. Although conflict at work may be uncomfortable, it can produce positive results, particularly when conflict is handled well; the results will most likely be better than if the conflict is ignored or avoided

2. People who disagree can still respect each other; make a ground rule to agree to disagree respectfully in order to protect the relationship and allow for space to express feelings and opinions
3. All people engaged in a conflict need to desire mutually positive results in order to maximize your chances for a successful resolution. If people are out to destroy or harm others, then a positive solution is not possible.
4. Each person needs to take the responsibility to help create an atmosphere of hope, trust, respect, and safety for all.
5. Listen to the other person's position-there may be a grain of truth in what is being said that is worth considering; remember, all conflict is an opportunity for personal growth!
6. An attitude of openness toward others-putting your automatic "no" on the shelf-enhances the likelihood for effective problem solving.
7. Conflict is an opportunity to develop personal integrity; a chance to think carefully about one's deepest wants, needs and values.
8. The final product of well-handled workplace conflict may be the mutual creation of a more productive, harmonious team environment

Conflict Prevention:

- Take responsibility for your own anger
- Make a personal commitment to stay calm and listen
- Anticipate and intercept your anger and frustration
- Realize you can say no to your anger
- Pick and choose your battles wisely; accept that there will always be differences between yourself and others on your team
- Understand and accept what you have the power/influence to change and what you are not able to change and make your choices based on that
- Offer 'healthy' support to others on the team and contribute to a compassionate team environment

The conflict management tips presented in this article: assessment, intervention and prevention are useful when applied consistently and with sincerity. While associations with conflict are often unpleasant and sometimes daunting, when you allow yourself to become skillful at understanding and responding to conflict, you (and your team) will begin to see enormous benefits!

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