

POSITIVE TIPS FOR THE JOB MARKET

Keeping the Peace:

How to Resolve Conflict in the Workplace

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Studies show that managers spend approximately 25% of their time resolving workplace conflicts. Clearly, this time and energy could be well spent elsewhere. Workplaces plagued by conflict suffer from decreased productivity, hindered performance, increased stress along with the resulting high turnover rate, absenteeism and, in the worst case scenario, violence.

Conflict may rear its ugly head as a result of an infinite amount of causes. The most popular, however, include: poor communication among employees, a lack of acceptance for and understanding of different values among co-workers, and personality clashes. Next, when individuals fight for their own personal goals without considering "team goals", differing interests may be the root of conflict. In addition, if individuals or several members of a group are not performing up to par while others are, disagreements will be inevitable while some believe they are being taken advantage of while others have unrealistic expectations of their job duties. Lastly, when employees see work as a competition for scarce resources (such as hours during slow periods, limited technology, or needed equipment) they may clash with one another, even though they all understand why these resources are in short supply.

There are **five ways in which conflict can be addressed**. Each of the following scenarios includes both pros and cons, however, only two are generally recommended as the best ways to approach conflict.

First of all, the most popular reaction to conflict is to look the other way and hope that it will pass; this is known as **avoidance**. Often, by not communicating concerns as soon as they surface, stress and discontent will be pent-up underground until they resurface in another, more serious, form in the future. Another more capitalistic approach entails a "may the best person win" attitude and encourages conflict to be resolved through **competition**. Next, some individuals may decide to surrender their own needs, goals or wishes in order to appease the other person which is commonly known as **accommodation**.

Lastly, the best ways to resolve workplace conflict revolve around ideas of **collaboration** (working together to find a mutually beneficial solution) and **compromise** (which includes finding a middle ground, even if either party isn't entirely pleased in the end). These approaches are usually suggested because they require proactive and creative cooperation among the competing parties.

The following are some tips for successful conflict resolution:

- First of all, communication must be done face to face.
- Openly and clearly articulate the causes of the conflict. Remember that others will have different perceptions and are entitled to their own opinions.
- Make a clear statement WHY you want to resolve the conflict.
- Communicate HOW you plan to resolve the conflict...have an action plan!
- You must stick to the matters at hand! Don't bring up irrelevant issues from the past.
- Don't lose your cool. If you find that you're getting too hot under the collar, take time out. Rethink and re-plan the steps you need to take to successfully resolve the situation.

All in all, conflict is not always a bad thing. It can lead to creative, forward-thinking problem solving and, in the long-run, solidify employee relationships. And, of course, you will have a much more positive and friendly work-environment in the end.

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