Managing Workplace Conflict

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Conflict at Work

Conflict occurs in every organization and to a certain degree implies a healthy exchange of ideas and creativity. However, unproductive conflict can result in employee dissatisfaction, a lack of productivity, poor service provided to consumers, high rates of absenteeism, increased employee turnover, and increased job stress.
Common Causes of Workplace Conflict

• **Personality differences** - Building awareness of personality differences is the first step in valuing and respecting these differences.

• **Non-compliance with rules and policies** - Rules and policies are in place for a reason. It is important to understand why they exist and the consequences for not following them.

• **Misunderstandings** - Ineffective communication is a large contributing factor to misunderstandings. Avoid making assumptions, instead ask for clarification when needed.

• **Competition** - When faced with quotas or incentives, one often forgets their purpose at work. One no longer views their coworkers as team members but as competitors. It is critical that one manages their emotions, and remember that one person’s success is good for the team as a whole.
Reducing Workplace Conflict

- Talk with the other person.
- Focus on behavior and events, not on personalities.
- Listen carefully.
- Identify points of agreement and disagreement.
- Prioritize the areas of conflict.
- Develop a plan to work on each conflict.
- Follow through on your plan.
- Build on your success.
Talk with the Other Person

• Ask the other person to come up with a time when it would be convenient to meet.

• Arrange to meet at a place where you will not be interrupted.
Focus on Behavior and Events, Not on Personalities

• Say “When this happens...” instead of “When you do...”

• Describe a specific incident or event instead of generalizing.
Listen Carefully

• Listen to what the other person is saying instead of getting ready to react.
• Avoid interrupting the other person.
• After the other person finishes speaking, rephrase what was said to make sure you understand them.
• Ask questions to clarify your understanding.
Identify Points of Agreement and Disagreement

• Summarize the areas of agreement and disagreement.

• Ask the other person if he or she agrees with your assessment.

• Modify your assessment until both of you agree on the areas of conflict.
Prioritize the Areas of Conflict

• Discuss which areas of conflict are most important to each of you to resolve.
Develop a Plan to Work on Each Conflict

• Start with the most important conflict.

• Focus on the future.

• Set up future meeting times to continue your discussions.
Follow Through on Your Plan

• Stick with the discussions until you have worked through each area of conflict.

• Maintain a collaborative “let’s-work-out-a-solution” attitude.
Build on Your Success

• Look for opportunities to point out progress.
• Compliment the other person’s insight and achievements.
• Congratulate each other when you make progress, even if the progress is small.

Your hard work will pay off when scheduled discussions eventually give way to ongoing, friendly communication.