

Seven Steps to Conflict Resolution

Conflict is defined as, “Any behavior between two or more individuals which prevents work from getting done”. This means that every time we experience a “hiccup” in our daily routines, it is not conflict. Focus your efforts on resolving those issues which actually prevent work from being completed.

- 1) **Everyone in the organization must be taught the rules and must agree to abide by the rules of conflict resolution.** The first step to making sure the organization runs smoothly is to make sure every individual knows these rules and agrees to abide by them.
- 2) **All conflict must be resolved at the source.** Following a hierarchical structure communication pattern reduces the probability of positive resolution.
- 3) **Conflicts are resolved one at a time.** There is a tendency to let issues build and mount until the last straw is reached, when a flood of conflicts come forth. In this chaos, no conflicts can be adequately resolved. Make sure you focus on only one issue at a time. If a number of issues exist, agree to work through them individually.
- 4) **Address behaviors, don’t attack individuals.** When a person feels he/she is being attacked, personally, the natural reaction is to defend (become defensive). By addressing a behavior, instead of attacking them personally, the focus becomes changing a behavior, not changing a personality. For example, attacking a person would sound like, “I hate the way you made me feel”, whereas addressing a behavior would sound like, “When you (do, say, behave, act, etc.) this way, I feel (angry, upset, demeaned, etc.)”
- 5) **Everyone must practice polite rules of communication.** Remember, he who yells first, loses. In no situation does name calling, demeaning statements, threats or raising a voice contribute to peaceful resolution. Each party deserves an opportunity to share their position, UNINTERRUPTED, in a positive, respectful environment.
- 6) **If conflict cannot be resolved, it must be managed.** Conflict that goes unresolved only builds and grows until an explosion. If there is no meeting of the minds, the agreement must be reached that, as adults, we agree to disagree on this subject and also commit to working together in spite of the disagreement.
- 7) **If an outside party is sought (supervisor), both parties must agree that the decision of the third party is binding.** The decision of the third party is final and must be accepted by the parties in conflict. Before a third party commits his/her time and energy to helping others resolve their conflict, it is important that the third party know, in advance, that their time won’t be wasted. Courtesy dictates that both parties agree, in advance, that they will heed the advice/decision of the third party.