



DEFUSE WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Designing, manufacturing, marketing, and selling goods and services requires a team of people with different missions to work together. This will lead to conflict. With good communication skills and some effort, we can prevent these conflicts from becoming explosions.

Here are some common workplace conflicts and tips for resolving them:

Departments have different goals. One department's goal may be to build a product as quickly as possible. A second department's may be to build the product as inexpensively as possible. A third department's goal may be to build the product with the highest possible quality. By working together, a creative solution can be found.

Employees competing with one another. Several people may have a common goal that only one person can achieve. For example, a manager resigns and all of the direct reports want the job. If the conflict becomes counterproductive, the company can bring in an outsider.

Excellent communication is critical. Here are some workplace communication tips to help you handle conflict:

- **Listen carefully.** Frequently, people spend their energy planning a counterpoint or daydreaming while others are speaking, rather than listening.
- **Remember the workplace is a cooperative-competitive environment.** Don't take competition personally.
- **Explain counterpoints.** Take the opportunity to explain competing points of view at least as well as you can present your own.
- **Don't try to impose your perfect solution.** Ask others how you can reach resolution.
- **Find value in others.** Let them know what you value.
- **Try to support everyone,** even those who do not support you and those you really don't like.
- **Make "How would you like to resolve this?" one of your favorite questions.**

- **Find out who said what.** If someone tells you "they said," send them back to find out who said it. Verify the information with whoever supposedly said it and understand why they said it (if they did).
- **Don't make it personal when you make a comment.** Don't take what others say personally.
- **Don't argue or deny.** Say thank you in a sincere tone of voice when someone provides feedback. Before responding in any other way, think about whether you should respond at all, and if you do respond, what will best help you to meet your objectives.
- **Treat others the way you want to be treated,** even if they don't treat you that way.
- **Acknowledge mistakes.** Demonstrate ownership for your actions and errors and communicate to others how you will prevent future mistakes.
- **Before arguing or escalating to higher management, decide if you really care about the outcome.** If not, be prepared to let it go.

How you conduct yourself in handling the conflict may be remembered far longer than any of the technical details.

I would like to thank Dr. Margarita Posada Cossuto for helpful comments.

RONALD G. SHAPIRO (The Ohio State University) is a speaker and consultant in career development, leadership development, and human factors/ergonomics. He is a graduate of the University of Rochester and Ohio State. He worked at IBM and writes for a variety of publications and speaks on college campuses and at conventions. Email him at DrRonShapiro@gmail.com.