



Helping Organizations Define and Develop Top Talent

Conflict Resolution

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Conflict in the workplace is one of the most costly problems organizations face today. It not only increases direct costs (settlements and judgments) but also indirect costs (rehiring, training, and the cost of productivity). Why is conflict so costly? The following worksheet should help you...

To calculate your Visible Cost of Turnover:

1. Estimate the number of employees that left your company during the last 12 months = _____
2. The average cost of turnover is _____% of their yearly base salary, bonuses, and commissions. Be sure to include the cost of employee benefits.
3. Annual wages \$ _____K X _____% of annual wages \$ _____ = \$ _____ lost per employee.
4. Total cost of turnover: Annual wages percentage (%) X number of employees replaced = \$ _____

This worksheet only takes into consideration the direct costs of turnover, there are several indirect costs such as: investment in training, special attention, revenue lost because an employee left, and other causes. When you add all of these factors up, it is easy to see how conflict in the workplace can be very costly for your company.

However, conflict doesn't always have to be costly. This article will present valuable and practical ways to deal with and resolve conflict whether you are at the executive or administrative level.

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First, one of the best ways to resolve conflict in the workplace is to simply face it. Create an atmosphere that encourages the resolution of conflict. When conflict emerges, don't ignore it, find out the real issue. An important fact to remember is that the presented issues are usually not the real issues that are causing the conflict. Remember: real issues usually involve some miscommunication or misperception.

There are a few simple steps to follow that will allow you to resolve conflict in the workplace while remaining unbiased to personal opinions. Talk to each person privately; do not even think about telling them to go talk to the other person unless you are confident that they can handle it. If the person will not open up to you about the issue at hand, find someone with whom they can talk to confidentially...but get the facts.

It is very important to always provide a confidential and neutral environment. If you or the Human Resource department can't provide this, search for outside mediators who can! Help the disputants arrive at their own solutions through mediation. Do not tell them what to do unless you need to enforce company policy or rules.

If you are handling the situation yourself, do not ignore feelings! Feelings will usually make up at least 50% of the problem. Listen when they say "I am angry, upset, hurt, disappointed, scared, feel unappreciated or frustrated". Look for old wounds and/or grievances that could be causing this conflict. Listen in order to understand! Be sure you are not forming your judgments while pretending to listen. Preserve your own and other's dignity and self-respect.

Do not begin to try and solve the problem until everyone agrees that all the facts are on the table. Be candid and complete when stating the facts. Remember, there is always more than one solution to the problem(s) at hand. It is possible to disagree without becoming disagreeable and/or defensive. Try to understand before being understood while listening with empathy.

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There are some very common causes of conflict that everyone in the working world should be aware of. Here are a few:

1. Inaccurate or incomplete information or goals
2. Ineffective or unacceptable method
3. Antagonistic or other negative feelings
4. Not enough support being provided
5. Acceptable ethical standards are not being followed
6. Inadequate resources and ineffective or inadequate training

Another point to keep in mind is how well you get along with others. Take this short quiz to find out.

Read each question and answer it honestly. Check YES or NO for each question.

	YES	NO
1. Do you only make promises you can keep..... and do you keep them?	___	___
2. Are you prompt and punctual, never keeping others waiting?	___	___
3. Are you willing to help a co-worker who is having trouble finishing an assignment on time?	___	___
4. Do you find it easy to forgive?	___	___
5. Do you go out of your way to be friendly?	___	___
6. When you are in a bad mood or not feeling well, do you try to maintain an even, pleasant temperament?	___	___
7. Are you dependable?	___	___
8. Do you overlook the minor faults that everyone has?	___	___
9. Are you tolerant of others' personal habits, even if they are quite annoying?	___	___
10. Do you remain open-minded when someone's views are in conflict with your?	___	___

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	YES	NO
11. Do you smile often?	___	___
12. Are you usually interested in how other people think and feel?	___	___
13. Do you try to keep your complaining to a minimum?	___	___
14. Do you help others because you want to – not because you can expect them to return the favor?	___	___
15. Do you criticize constructively?	___	___
16. Are you sensitive to others' feelings?	___	___
17. Do you try to be courteous and polite at all times?	___	___
18. Do you listen with your ears, not with your mouth?	___	___
19. Do you make an effort not to take people for granted?	___	___
20. Through your attitude, do you help others to feel good about themselves?	___	___
21. Do you stick up for your own ethical standards?	___	___
22. Are you honest and truthful?	___	___
23. Are you willing to accept blame and admit your mistakes?	___	___
24. Do you usually trust people?	___	___
25. Do you really understand the meaning of "give and take"?	___	___
26. Do you think about how your words and deeds affect other people?	___	___

Total YES_____

Total NO_____

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Finally, remember these few points when working day to day.

If you come to a point in your career where you must apologize, do it directly, straightforwardly, and promptly. Do not say you are sorry if you do not mean it. It is just as important to know when to apologize, so don't apologize if you don't have to...you may be selling yourself short if you do!

Learn how to say "no"! There is an art to saying "no", and it must be practiced! Only say "no", when you know that you have reached your limit and cannot help someone, you must try to refuse graciously. You can do this by perhaps suggesting a useful alternative. Try to explain your position honestly without hostility or whining (offer to help on another occasion if possible).

Use your humor appropriately! Having what is often called a "good sense of humor" means having the sense to use humor appropriately. Jokes that are ethical or off-color are never appropriate in the workplace. To be safe when in doubt, keep quiet.

Handle criticism gracefully. Choose to ignore, outwit, or simply laugh at any put-downs directed towards you in the workplace. However, there will be times when confronting your criticism directly or indirectly is warranted. When the put down is a dodge or a cop-out- or a dismissal of your idea, request or suggestion, it calls for an active response. Also keep in mind that the put-downer or criticizer may not even be aware of having dismissed, criticized, and/or have cut you off. Always take criticism for what it is worth and nothing more. Always remember to put off discussion until you are calm, then remain objective & separate yourself from your actions.

Control your temper! Although anger is normal and common, the display of anger is highly inappropriate on the job. When you feel a surge of anger, remove yourself until you can rationally evaluate the situation. For instance, go for a walk, take a break, or go out to lunch. Remember to always say how you feel, not what so and so said.

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The easiest and by far most important way to avoid causing conflict in the workplace is to ignore gossip. Office gossiping is VERY unprofessional. Try to stay away from situations that are conducive to gossip. If someone is repeating gossip, try to diffuse it by saying "Of course, that's only what we heard." When all else fails, the safest action is no action, in other words, KEEP QUIET & NEVER REPEAT GOSSIP!

We hope these tips to deal with, resolve, and avoid conflict in the workplace were helpful to you. If you would like more information on this subject or a seminar addressing ways to avoid conflict, please feel free to contact us.

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