



BalanceWorks® Newsletter

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Conflict Resolution

Everyone has their own unique way of working, problem solving, and communicating. People have different strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds, goals, and expectations. These are the attributes that foster productive and innovative worksites, but it is also what makes conflict in the workplace so common. With so many different perspectives, minor conflict is natural and should be expected and is certainly not the sign of a bad work environment. The key is successfully resolving conflict before it becomes ingrained and negatively affects corporate culture.

When conflict permeates a workplace and no attempt is made by management or the employees to resolve the situation, it can lead to:

- Decreased productivity
- Increased employee stress
- High turnover rate
- Excessive absenteeism

The best approach to minimize conflict with a co-worker is to attempt to resolve the issue or concern as soon as possible to avoid escalation. Many times conflicts arise from a simple misunderstanding that gets blown out of proportion because it is not addressed. Prior to resolving a concern with a colleague, make sure you go into the situation with a clear head. Never assume that the

person meant to hurt, spite, or annoy you. By assuming good faith, you will be less likely to enter the conversation angrily and instead remain objective.

For smaller isolated misunderstandings, sometimes it is best to just ask your co-worker to clarify what happened. Many times people have completely different views of an interaction because they are looking at it from different perspectives. Other times, someone may have offended you and not even realized it. For example:

Sam: *“Good morning John, can we find time to discuss that report today”*

John: *“I have a meeting with Tanya right now”*

This interaction left Sam feeling slighted. He felt John could have at least said hello and taken a few seconds to schedule a meeting later in the day. Instead of stewing on his anger, Sam approached John later to ask about their interaction that morning. John explained that he was running 15 minutes late for a meeting and that Tanya, his Supervisor, was already mad that he was late. He then said he was so rushed that his conversation with Sam didn't even register, but that he was sorry for appearing rude. After this conversation, both men were on the same page and were able to peacefully get back to business as usual.

For more information or support on Conflict Resolution, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks®** by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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For more entrenched conflicts, it is a good idea to schedule a block of time to meet with the person you are clashing with because rushing the interaction will inevitably lead to more frustration. Prior to this meeting, it is a good idea to outline the meeting itself to ensure that the conversation is structured constructively. The following sample outline will help you to remain objective, reduce blame, and hopefully come to a resolution:

- 1. Identify the issue in objective terms** – Start by describing the situation using a factual account and acknowledge how your colleague and yourself participated in it. Do not reflect upon how this made you feel or what you think the other person's motives were: "I've noticed that after every sales meeting, we both end up defending our positions in the boss's office later that day, which includes voicing disapproval of each other's opinions. Would you agree that this occurs?" Then let them give their perception of the events and come to an agreement about what actually occurred.
- 2. Apologize** – Always accept blame and apologize for your part in the conflict. This sets the stage for a resolution. "I'm sorry that I have gone to the boss in the past, I understand that this approach does not solve anything."
- 3. Show Appreciation** – Relay something that you find positive about them to show that you believe it is worth resolving your differences and working together. "You are a skilled salesman and I think I could learn from your techniques."
- 4. Describe the Negative Consequences** – Give an account of why the conflict is bad for the company, to further show that a resolution really must be reached. "The way we are currently handling our disagreements is having a negative effect on sales and lowering productivity."
- 5. Outcomes and Objectives** – Discuss what a satisfying resolution will look like and set

forth action items to prevent future conflicts. "From now on we should first discuss our differing opinions with each other to try and come to a consensus and if we are at a standstill, then we can approach the boss together for a final decision."

Of course this will not always work if your colleague is unwilling to make any effort toward resolution. If this is the case it is advisable to recruit a neutral third party, such as an HR Rep, to mediate the conflict.

A positive environment always makes work more enjoyable and enables you to perform at a higher level. Here are a few quick tips to maintain good relationships with your co-workers:

Exchange Niceties – Make an effort to say hello each morning and goodbye in the evening. Smile and nod when you pass people in the hallway. These small gestures help people feel comfortable and enhance group cohesiveness.

Practice Small Talk – Partake in discussions with your co-workers about non-invasive personal information like their children, hobbies, favorite TV shows and vacation spots. Sharing personal information builds relationships and helps people relate to each other.

Ask for Opinions – Asking co-workers for their input shows them that their opinion matters and that their contributions are appreciated.

Avoid Gossip – The best way to retain the trust and respect of your colleagues is to not partake in harmful gossip.

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