

# Handling Conflict at Work

Conflict is defined as the negative feelings experienced between people and groups in problematic relationships. Conflict at work can hurt the quality of your work and the work of those around you. Conflicts arise in a number of ways: disagreements between co-workers, jealousy of positions or salaries, gossip, or office politics can all create uncomfortable situations. When conflict rears its ugly head, it's good to remember that most conflicts can be solved by listening, talking through your problems and even sometimes realizing that your conflict has fizzled out. Here are some tips on how to handle and help avoid conflicts at work.

## Things to Remember

- If a conflict is between you and just one other person, try to work it out between the two of you, rather than bringing others into the conflict.
- In a workplace, everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Treat others the way you want to be treated, and don't put people down.
- Give credit where credit is due; if someone has helped you on a project or proposal, make sure others are aware that the person deserves credit for helping.
- Don't accuse people falsely or before you know the whole story.
- Try to avoid making *everything* into a competition (this can lead to suspicion, resentment and jealousy) or taking on an "I'm better than you" attitude.
- Give people the benefit of the doubt; don't automatically assume that people are out to make you look bad.
- Remember, everyone thinks differently and no one can read your mind. Don't expect others to know what you're thinking or what you want done.



***Communication is key!***



## Web Resources

**Resolving Conflicts at Work and at Home**  
<http://www.swedish.org/15310.cfm>



**How to Resolve Conflicts at Work**  
[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_3820\\_resolve-conflicts-work.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_3820_resolve-conflicts-work.html)

## Common Practices that Might Get You into Conflict



**Gossip:** Gossip has a funny way of getting back to the person it's targeted at. It's a good idea to keep some thoughts to yourself in order to avoid conflict.

**Omitting Credit:** Omitting credit to a colleague on a project will only result in negative actions.

**Rudeness:** Many times people are rude without even knowing it. Make an effort to always say thank you and be kind.

**Pointing Out Faults:** Constantly pointing out minor faults in a person's work, approach, style or voice can make them defensive or angry; keep your criticisms constructive.

## Steps to Take to Amend a Conflict



- Before reacting to a confrontational coworker, always think first. Did you do something to provoke negative behavior from a colleague? Were you rude? If yes, stop your actions and smile at that person, and make sure they know what you meant.
- Don't attempt to match another person's behavior. Two wrongs don't make a right. Confront her in a civil manner or let it pass.
- Use humor. Humor has the ability to make a tense situation blow over. Try to point out something funny about the situation and always smile. Remember to never use self-deprecation or a sarcastic tone (what you might mean as a joke can come across as a rude comment to another person).
- Don't complain to others about the conflict or the other person. The conflict is between you and that person, it is not an office wide event.
- Don't hold a grudge. No one expects you to be best friends, but be civil; smile, say hello, and you can just keep it at that.

***Most employers have policies and procedures for handling conflicts between employees. If you can't work it out yourself, you should go to your supervisor and see what they recommend for amending the conflict.***

## Further Reading

*The Big Sister's Guide to the World of Work* by Marcelle DiFalco and Jocelyn Greenky Herz

*Resolving Conflicts at Work* by Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith

*How to Reduce Workplace Conflict and Stress: How Leaders and Their Employees Can Protect Their Sanity and Productivity from Tension and Turf* by Anna Maravelas

*The Big Aha!: Breakthroughs in Resolving and Preventing Workplace Conflict* by Bill Wiersma

*The Conflict and Communication Activity Book: 30 High Impact Training Exercises for Adult Learners* by Bill Withers and Keami D. Lewis

## The Big Picture

Keep in mind it's not just what you say that matters, it's also how you say it, how you act and your body language. It is easy to tell when someone is genuine with their actions or words and when they are being fake. It takes much more energy to be upset or angry at someone than to be civil and kind. Remember, he/she is your colleague, so chances are you will see him/her every day. Solve your conflict in its early stages in order to avoid an ugly situation in the future.

**Sometimes conflict can be a positive thing; it can start conversations which spark new ideas and projects and strengthen relationships. Follow the steps and suggestions in this tip sheet and you should be well on your way to being able to handle conflict at work if it ever arises.**