

Conflicts At Your Job

Workers may have problems getting along. Conflicts can be positive because conflicts require talking and problem solving. But when conflicts are left unresolved, the conflict can have a negative affect on all workers in the workplace. Therefore, conflicts have costs: stress for workers, feelings of anger, damaged work relationships that harm productivity (amount of work done on job), and loss of worker morale (cheerfulness and willingness to do tasks of the job). Customers may feel uncomfortable when there is a conflict among workers, and workers may feel like quitting their jobs.

Informal Conflict Resolution

A conflict with your coworker is complicated, so finding a solution will require your best positive attitude. Decide if the conflict can be handled by yourself with the coworker, or would be better to ask your supervisor for help.



To handle the conflict yourself with the coworker: **First**, approach the coworker with positive body language (no scowling or clenched fists). **Second**, calmly and politely say what the issue is and your solution (no screaming or crying), and smile. Your coworker probably feels a negative relationship with you, so you will create respect if you present positive body language and calm tone of voice. **Third**, ask your coworker to describe the situation from his or her viewpoint, and listen respectfully without interruption. Sometimes just listening with respect will help solve the conflict. **Fourth**, take responsibility for any issue that is your fault. **Fifth**, explain the situation from your point of view. **Sixth**, ask your coworker for suggestions to resolve (solve and end) the conflict, then again present your suggestions. **Seventh**, try to come to an agreement to resolve the conflict that both of you can accept.

If these seven steps do not resolve the conflict, ask your supervisor for help. With calm body language and polite voice, ask your supervisor for a private meeting to discuss a conflict issue. Before the meeting, **document (write down)** the type of conflict and steps you tried with your coworker to resolve the conflict. When writing the document, keep it brief, "just facts," and do not write about feelings or emotions.



With your supervisor, use calm body language and a polite voice. Explain what you tried with your coworker that was unsuccessful. You may give the supervisor a copy of the written document about the conflict. Ask your supervisor for help in finding a solution because you do not want **worker morale** and **quality of work to suffer** because of the conflict. Keep the conversation calm and polite with your supervisor. Show no anger, harsh words, name calling, and do not cry. Supervisors like positive attitudes, and may even consider you for a promotion in the future if you prove that you can handle yourself well under the pressure of a conflict.

Supervisors may promote workers who proves skills in handling conflicts in a calm, polite way.

Formal Conflict Resolution

Sometimes informal conflict solving meetings are not successful, so the supervisor may require a formal conflict resolution (solving) meeting led by a neutral person not involved in the conflict. No phones are allowed in the meeting! Here are steps in a formal conflict resolution meeting:

1. **Define the Conflict:** Define the issue by asking and answering these questions: What is the disagreement? What are the facts? What do we need to talk about? How does this issue affect others workers? Each worker explains their view either in writing or verbally (by talking) to the neutral person.
2. **Define the Feelings:** Each worker talks about the emotions felt. Emotions are explained so that everyone understands the emotions the other worker is feeling.
3. **Brainstorm:** With the neutral third person, workers discuss solutions and make a list of possible solutions. It is important to show **positive behavior during the brainstorming session:** uncross your legs and arms; no eye rolling, head shake, or other body language that is offensive; nod your head “yes” or say “I understand” to let others know you are listening; keep eye contact; keep your voice calm and polite (no screaming); keep an open mind knowing that each person in the conflict will have valuable suggestions to offer; use the words “we” and “us” instead of “you”; verbally take responsibility for your part in the conflict. **Neutral person will recognize** that you are keeping a positive attitude in a stressful situation. **The neutral person may tell your supervisor** about your positive, professional behavior during the meeting.
4. **Negotiate a Solution:** Write a list of solutions that are OK. Then, write a list of solutions that are NOT OK. Discuss what each worker can do to compromise (give up something) to move the ideas that are NOT OK to the OK list. Agree on a solution that allows each worker to feel good about the solution.
5. **Settle the Conflict:** Write the agreement on a piece of paper. Each worker is asked to verbally says “yes” to the agreement. Sometimes the neutral third person asks all workers to sign the agreement. Finally, the agreement is put into action.



QUICK CHECK:

1. Why can conflicts be positive?
2. List 5 costs of conflicts.
3. Define: a) productivity. b) morale.
4. a) **First step:** How should you approach the co-worker? b) **Second:** What 2 things should you say? c) **Third:** What do you let your coworker describe? How should you listen? d) **Fourth:** For what should you take responsibility? e) **Fifth:** What should you explain? f) **Sixth:** What should you ask your coworker? What should you present? g) **Seventh:** What should you try to do?
5. With calm body and polite voice, what should you ask your supervisor?
6. a) Define "document." b) What 2 things do you document? c) How do you keep it?
7. a) During the meeting, what body language and voice should you use? b) What should you explain? c) What may you give your supervisor? d) What should you ask your supervisor? e) Because of what 2 reasons? f) How should you keep the conversation?
8. What do supervisors like?
9. Who may supervisors promote?
10. Formal resolution: Who leads the meeting?
11. a) **List 5 steps in a formal conflict resolution** b) **What happens during each step.**
12. List 5 things you can do to show a positive attitude during the Brainstorm step.
13. a) What will the neutral person recognize? c) What may the neutral person tell the boss?
13. a) Which would you prefer: informal or formal conflict resolution method? b) In essay of 25 words or more, give reasons for your answer.