

Managing Workplace Conflict

There are many causes or reasons for conflict in any work setting. Some of the primary causes are the following:

- **Poor Communication:** different communication styles can lead to misunderstandings between employees or between employee and manager. Lack of communication drives conflict 'underground'.
- **Different Values:** any workplace is made up of individuals who see the world differently. Conflict occurs when there is a lack of acceptance and understanding of these differences.
- **Differing Interests:** conflict occurs when individual workers 'fight' for their personal goals, ignoring organizational goals and organizational well-being.
- **Scarce Resources:** too often, employees feel they must compete for available resources in order to do their job. In a resource scarce environment, this causes conflicts – despite awareness of how scarce resources may be.
- **Personality Clashes:** all work environments are made up of differing personalities. Unless colleagues understand and accept each other's approach to work and problem-solving, conflict will occur.
- **Poor Performance:** when one or more individuals within a work unit are not performing - not working up to potential – and this is not addressed, conflict is inevitable.

There are several ways to address workplace conflict:

- **Avoidance:** 'hiding our head in the sand', hoping the conflict will go away.
- **Collaboration:** working together to find a mutually beneficial solution.
- **Compromise:** finding the middle ground whereby a 'little is given, and little is gotten'.
- **Competing:** 'may the best person win'.
- **Accommodation:** surrendering our own needs and wishes to please the other person.

COLLABORATION or **COMPROMISE** are the most productive forms of addressing conflict because there is not a winner or loser but rather a working together for the best possible solution.

Arriving at a positive resolution of conflict is always the goal. In resolving conflict, it is important to make sure you do the following:

- Clearly articulate the causes of the conflict – openly acknowledging there will be differing perceptions of the problem(s).
- Make a clear statement of why you want the conflict resolved and reasons to work on conflict.
- Communication of how you want the conflict resolved.
- Address the issues face-to-face (notes, email correspondence, memos are not a productive way to resolve differences).

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- Stick to the issues. In trying to resolve conflict, it is tempting to resort to name calling or bring up issues from the past. It is important to address specific behaviors and situations if change is to take place.
- Take time out if necessary. In the resolution of a conflict, our emotions may interfere with arriving at a productive resolution. If this transpires, take a time-out and resume resolving the conflict at another designated time.

Everyone finds himself or herself on the receiving end of criticism from time to time. When this happens, the most important thing is to remain calm and fight the instinct to become paranoid or defensive. Here are five tips that can help you to handle criticism and turn it into a positive learning experience:

1. **Listen.** Keep an open mind. Everyone makes mistakes, and we can all use improvement in some areas. Resist the temptation to argue or make excuses.
2. **Consider the source.** Does the speaker have the authority, knowledge, and expertise to give you this feedback? Does he or she have an ulterior motive (Be careful not to invent one; though, just to make yourself feel better)?
3. **Ask for specific examples.** Don't accept generalities such as "poor," "disappointing," or "lousy." Politely ask the speaker to tell you exactly what is wrong. Questions like, "Exactly what was wrong with the presentation" or a request such as, "Help me to understand what you mean by 'poor'" should help you to get some useful information.
4. **Evaluate the criticism.** If it is valid, accept it gracefully and with a positive attitude. Tell the speaker you appreciate his or her comments and be enthusiastic about your willingness and ability to use the suggestions to improve your performance.
5. **Keep the useful information but let go of the negative feelings.** Don't dwell on the embarrassment of being criticized. Hold your head up high and move on.

Chain of Command:

1. Employees should talk with their supervisor, for unit staff this would be the Charge Nurse. They must attempt to give the supervisor a chance to resolve the problem.
2. If the employee is not satisfied with the results of the discussion with the supervisor, they may talk to the C.O.O.
3. If the employee is not satisfied with the results of the discussion with the C.O.O., they may talk with the administrator.
4. The administrator's determination shall be final and binding in all matters.