

Can't We All Just Get Along?

By Kim Freedman

Unless you are a hermit, you simply cannot avoid some degree of conflict when interacting with others in a work or personal setting. Conflict in and of itself is not a problem. Rather, it is the negative byproducts of unresolved and mismanaged conflict that are the problem. Unresolved interpersonal conflict can escalate and manifest itself in such ugly behaviors as backstabbing, gossiping, withholding information, judging, undermining, and the list goes on and on.

Studies have shown that the negative effects of workplace conflict can reduce team productivity by as much as 50 percent. Most people would agree that in our increasingly competitive global marketplace, anything that gets in the way of productivity is a serious issue.

The most common cause of interpersonal conflict is differences – differences in personality, opinion, culture, work style, experience, and so on. Human nature is such that if we perceive these differences as a potential threat to our interests or sense of well-being, a conflict usually arises.

Since conflict is inevitable, how can we best respond? Here are 7 useful tips for the next time you find yourself in conflict with another person:

1. Practice self management. Stay calm and slow down your thinking. Resist the impulse to react immediately.
2. Recognize that your position is based on your perception of the situation and vice versa. Consider the very real possibility that your way of seeing the situation is not the only way.
3. Hear the other person out. Actively listen with an open mind.
4. Create a shared understanding of the facts and uncover assumptions through open and honest dialogue. Recognize that assumptions are not facts unless both parties agree that they are facts.
5. Sincerely apologize if you have caused the other person any pain or distress, even if it was unintentional.
6. Focus on the present and the future. You can't change the past, so let it go.
7. Get really clear about what you want going forward. Do you want to create a more cooperative working relationship? Clearly state what you want and what you are willing to do differently to achieve it.



What is your level of conflict competence? Learn to appreciate the benefits of healthy conflict – diversity of ideas, better problem solving, and greater creativity. Managers who are comfortable and competent in managing conflict and in coaching their team members to effectively resolve conflicts reap the benefits of a stronger and more collaborative team.

Kim Freedman, President of [Catalyst Leadership Coaching, LLC](#), uses customized training programs and one-on-one coaching to help businesses develop effective leaders and productive teams. She also offers personal coaching to professionals who want to achieve their goals and have more time, energy, and money in the process.

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