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Meaningful Workplace Conflict and Conflict Resolution Strategies



Conflict in the workplace must never be ignored or avoided. Appropriate conflict includes: challenging a bad boss, lobbying passionately for change, a cause or belief, dealing with difficult colleagues, bringing important differences to any discussion, speaking up to disagree or propose a different approach even in the face of pressure from the group to agree.

How we approach conflict can bring people together or divide them. To that end, we examine expected and appropriate workplace conflict and how it can constructively evolve into meaningful workplace conflict. We discuss approaches to conflict resolution. The sections we call “Practice Professional Courage” and “Your Sensory Rescue Kit” will explain some key pointers on how to deal with and resolve personal conflict before it spirals out of control.

Meaningful Workplace Conflict and Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict can arise in the workplace when two or more individuals or groups have different objectives, opinions, expectations, work habits, personal prejudices, cultural differences, rivalries, or competing interests. Quite often, the clash is due to a misunderstanding or lack of communication between co-workers or a power imbalance between managers and those that report to them.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Conflict

Conflict in the workplace must ever be ignored or avoided. Appropriate conflict includes: challenging a bad boss, lobbying passionately for change, a cause or belief, dealing with difficult colleagues, bringing important differences to any discussion, and speaking up to disagree or propose a different approach even in the face of pressure from the group to agree.

Because conflict triggers strong emotions and because people tend to respond to conflict based on their perceptions, minor disagreements can escalate to incessant bickering, complaining, deceptive ploys or a loud fracas. Sometimes, the parties on either side of a conflict can feel demoralized, humiliated, fearful, vulnerable, powerless, or in jeopardy. In most workplace conflicts, people do not set out to cause problems, but bullying and harassment do exist and can go from bad to worse and cause lasting personal harm.

Workplace conflicts left unresolved can cause people to become withdrawn, depressed, or traumatized. These types of conflicts are real disruptions that exacerbate existing work stress for everyone in the workplace. Conflicts involving vendors or clients deserved equal attention because left unresolved they often spiral out of control quickly and put the future of the business and the livelihood of all employees at risk.

No Environment or Relationship is Conflict-Proofed

How we Approach Conflict can Bring People Together or Divide Them

There is no environment or relationship that is free of conflict. As long as we have differences in personality traits, backgrounds, upbringing, childhood experiences, and workplace goals, conflict is sure to happen. How we approach and deal with conflict can bring people together or divide them.

When handled properly and in a healthy manner, conflict resolution not only increases understanding among the involved parties, it helps to build trust and strengthen workplace or personal relationships. Within proactive organizations, these differences are expected and viewed as opportunities for open discussion, inspiration, better decisions, and significant meaningful outcomes for the organization and the individuals. These organizations cultivate a workplace environment that sets clear expectations and encourages individuals to “practicing personal, organizational courage”.

Think about the times you witnessed conflicts between coworkers or between managers and vendors or clients. How do you respond to workplace conflict?

- Are you the individual that has personal or organizational courage and is able to voice your opinion on issues without involving personalities?
- Do you fear conflict or avoid it at all costs? If you have never learned how to engage in meaningful or healthy conflict, you may think of conflict as scary, harmful, and hurtful.
- Have you witnessed or been involved in constructive conflict resolution and gained valuable insight from the experience?
- Do you have a strategy to resolve controversy with people in the workplace?
- If you have had an opportunity to be a mediator how do you rate your conflict resolution skills?
- Do you know the difference between compromise and collaborative negotiation?

Conflict resolution is not just one skill but a combination of different skills working together. Since conflict exists in our world, it would do every one of us well to become skilled in the art of negotiation, conflict resolution, or engaging in meaningful conflict with professional courage.

In this guide we will explore these skills in more detail.

To that end, we examine expected and appropriate workplace conflict and how it can constructively evolve into meaningful workplace conflict. We discuss approaches to conflict resolution. The sections we call “Practice Professional Courage” and “Your Sensory Rescue Kit” will explain some key pointers on how to deal with and resolve personal conflict before it spirals out of control. When you are tasked with resolving conflict among other individuals, we demonstrate how you can navigate through the process like a pro in twelve steps.

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Understanding the Causes of Workplace Conflict

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Conflict in the Workplace Should Never be Ignored or Avoided

Conflict is sure to happen in the workplace. It is a natural part of workplace life. Especially, when individuals work closely together in confined spaces. When you also place them in complex, demanding work environments they are bound to have differences on an intellectual and emotional level. People have different backgrounds, personalities, work styles. Their differences can stimulate and inspire them to creatively meet the workplace challenges in innovative ways, but these same differences can also get in the way of how people manage their time and complete their tasks as well as affect how they work together or even how they cope with their own personalities.

No workplace conflict should ever be ignored or avoided. It may feel safer to ignore conflict, but it never really disappears. More often than not, it simmers just below the surface. Why:

- Minor disagreements can escalate because conflict triggers strong emotions.
- People tend to respond to conflict based on their perceptions. They focus on the differences experienced with another person rather than on the beliefs and goals they have in common with each other, and their shared vision as it pertains to an organizations goals.
- In the midst of the emotions, it can be difficult to foresee a win-win situation. People can feel threatened by conflict because they are afraid they may not get what they want if the other party gets what they want.
- People have not learned the best ways to challenge a bad boss, lobby for change, deal with difficult colleagues, stand up for their beliefs, or resolve workplace conflicts in healthy ways.
- People are unskilled in managing or resolving conflict or even potential conflict.



Conflict can divide people or bring them together. Conflict between coworkers, or between managers and vendors or clients can be healthy when managed properly and effectively. There are two kinds of conflict in the workplace:

1. Inappropriate Work Conflict
2. Appropriate Work Conflict

Inappropriate Conflict in the Workplace

Many complex work environments can be susceptible to the damaging effects of workplace conflict. Left unaddressed, the conflict usually escalates. Dealing with a workplace that is seething with hostility and negativity can be a major challenge. How you effectively address negative conflict depends on whether you control it or not, and if you are able to identify how the conflict originated.

If you are a manager or owner of the business, unresolved, ongoing or destructive conflict can cost you in terms of productivity, sick leave, long-term disability claims, employee resourcefulness, and employee turnover. It is your responsibility to make the atmosphere more positive, productive, supportive and safe for everyone. The timeliness of your intervention is important to prevent violence, promote workplace safety, and maintain positive employee morale.

When you are in Control:

1. Listen. People may just need a sounding board. Before you jump to conclusions or make decisions listen to their concerns.
2. Communicate before an issue escalates. When decisions are made that may impact employees, provide the rationale for decisions. Explain corporate thinking and the events that are responsible for the negative circumstances. Sharing everything you know about a situation helps people to understand. It builds trust thus opening the door to better communication.
3. When faced with conflict, determine the underlying cause.
 - When a company matter has been misunderstood and employees are acting on incorrect information, gather the individuals together and clarify the facts.
 - When employees deliberately misrepresented or misinterpreted facts you may have to terminate their employment. Likewise, when they bully other employees or customers.

Learn more about of Harm Caused by Exclusionary Behaviors and Cliques in the Workplace

 - When it is a matter of miscommunication and you recognize it as a repeat issue, take steps to solve the underlying problem. Maybe whoever is writing the memos is not including enough information or simply is not skilled at communication.
4. If the underlying cause is difficult to identify, form a problem solving team. Include the employees who are closest to the conflict in the process of identifying all the possible causes of the conflict.
 - Solicit widespread input from all the parties that are directly affected or may be affected by the negativity.
 - Allow multiple opportunities for the parties to solicit and participate in an information exchange at each step of the process.

5. Develop an action plan.
 - People who help create options feel included. More often than not, when they feel part of the communication and problem-solving process, they develop effective solutions.
 - Because all parties participated in the discussions leading to solutions they will not be surprised by the action plan once it is implemented.
6. Always communicate as much information as you can about the issues and the solutions.
7. Implement the solutions quickly and always follow up.

When you are not in control:

If you are an employee who is experiencing the impact of decisions or issues that are out of your control, you may not be able to resolve the negative conflict, but you do have control over how you handle the negativity and the conflict.

1. The first step is to identify exactly what it is that causes you to feel negative or believe that you are involved in a conflict.
2. Determine if you are reacting to information that is false or true.
3. Identify any aspects of the conflict that you can affect.
4. Provide feedback to your supervisors or managers. Sometimes people make decisions based on inadequate knowledge or they do not predict the outcome. By sharing your ideas in a constructive manner you can help identify an issue or provide input that leads to better decision making.
5. Be visible and available to your colleagues. Participate in company surveys, constructive discussions sessions, lunches with the manager, etc.
6. Where no opportunity exists for open discussion, approach your managers about being proactive in setting aside time for discussing issues before they escalate.
7. Take a positive courageous stance. Challenge pessimistic thinking and negative beliefs about people, the company, and work issues. Do not let false statements or negative thinking go unchallenged.
8. Ask open-ended questions to determine the cause and the scope of the negative feelings or reaction. When people react to faulty information or overreact, your questions may help others identify what it really is that they are feeling negative about. Can you help people create options or feel included? Can you take part in the communication and problem-solving?
9. Explore your options. Depending on the severity of the conflict you may have to explore professional guidance or consider finding a new employer.

Appropriate Workplace Conflict Evolves into Meaningful Workplace Conflict

The intricate nature of today's workplace – competing demands, fast-paced environment, global opportunities, and all the aspects of the workplace that keep evolving – makes the environment challenging and conflict probable. Within forward thinking organizations, appropriate conflict is not only expected, it is considered a necessary part of any affirmative work environment.

These organizations create a workplace culture, designed to preclude negative and inappropriate conflict as much as possible. Protocols are put in place to effectively manage appropriate conflict, while allowing the individuals who experience conflict to identify their differences, understand them, and find ways to work together. They resolve their differences in a healthy constructive manner that usually ends in a win-win for everyone.

Campaigning for Positive Change

Appropriate conflict includes:
challenging a bad boss, lobbying passionately for change, a cause or

belief, dealing with difficult colleagues, bringing important differences to any discussion, speaking up to disagree or propose a different approach even in the face of pressure from the group to agree.

Key Points in Managing Appropriate Conflict in the Workplace

Appropriate workplace conflict is highlighted by these key points:

- The organization deems it a priority to deal with conflict in order to advance effective communication, problem solving, and the interpersonal relationships of their team members.
- You do not have to like everyone, but in a professional and productive work environment, it is vital to respect differences.
- Conflict is constructive and instructive when it brings people together:
 - They focus on the issues not the personalities:
 - They share ideas, perspectives and values.
 - They can disagree over their goals, methods or the needs of the team.
 - They feel heard and respected.
 - They learn to understand each other and accept each other.
 - They create ways to work together.
 - They solve problems.
- Conflict has value
 - When problems are effectively resolved.
 - When the conflict resolution process enhances the ability of people to relate to one another and work together.
 - When the overall goals of the team and the organization are maintained or enhanced.

Meaningful Workplace Conflict is a Hot Topic

When bright diverse, highly skilled individuals with different personalities, backgrounds, and work styles collaborate in complex demanding work environments they are bound to have differences on an intellectual and emotional level. Proactive, confident organizations view those differences as opportunities for meaningful conflict and significant outcomes for both the individual and the organization.

On that basis, proactive organizations cultivate a workplace environment that encourages individuals to “practicing personal, organizational courage”. In this atmosphere, differences of opinion are encouraged and healthy debate is the norm.

The organization encourages individuals to identify their differences, understand them, and find ways to work together. They want individual team members to speak up when they disagree or have an opinion that is different from others in the group. The company recognizes, thanks, and rewards individuals who are willing to take a stand and support their position.

Meaningful outcomes for the organization:

- Those differences can stimulate and inspire the individuals to work together to meet the workplace challenges in creative ways.
- When people can disagree with each other and lobby for different ideas, their differences result in a more thorough study of options, better decisions, and innovative thinking.
- When organizational goals are aligned and all employees are moving in the same direction, healthy work conflict about how to get there is respected. The individuals may have lobbied passionately for their cause or belief, yet, when all the debating is over, they are more likely to support the decisions made by the team just as passionately.
- All these positives make the organization healthier.
- Both the increase in productivity and the effectiveness of the workplace help serve customers and help the business thrive.



Meaningful outcomes for the individual:

- The individuals learn how to manage conflict constructively.
- They do not feel stifled by leadership or their workplace environment.
- Standing up for principles or ideas that you believe in can create meaningful change.
- Having the professional courage to stand up for your ideas, goals and dreams means you are more likely feel proud of yourself and happy with your choices.
- It can increase understanding among the parties involved because it causes people to listen and consider different ideas.
- It builds a deeper sense of trust among the individuals and with leadership.
- It creates a more meaningful work environment. The individuals feel they have an impact on decisions and actions that affect their jobs. They feel enabled to take action and be in control of work and decision making in autonomous ways.

Cultivating a Proactive Environment to Effectively Manage Workplace Conflict

To cultivate a workplace environment that fosters healthy meaningful conflict your organization must first understand the various kinds of conflict that might arise in the workplace and second examine the specifics of the workplace to identify where conflict might exist. The goal is to preclude needless conflict and then effectively manage what conflicts cannot be eliminated, while also fostering an arena for open discussion and creating opportunities for meaningful conflict that leads to greater individual expression.

Key Decisions

To cultivate an arena for discussion and meaningful conflict proactive companies agree they want to be surrounded by individuals who are committed to the same organizational goals and direction. They hire people who will look for the best approach, the best idea, and the best solution, not just the one that will benefit their own area of interest. They want the people in their organization spending their time being creative, productive, and passionate about their work.

They agree on the following key decisions:

- Make the rationale for upper management decisions transparent.
- Set up relationship guidelines or rules that foster communication and that employees can agree to follow.
- Make certain that policies and communication are clear and consistent.
- Ensure that all employees, managers, and leaders are accountable for resolving conflict. This allows the individuals to exercise their freedom of speech and resolve the conflict among themselves. Employees of the organization are expected to spend their time problem solving and solution-seeking rather than finger-pointing.
- Never ignore conflict and do not avoid taking steps to prevent it. All organizations want a harmonious workplace, but not at the sacrifice of everyone's success.
- Seek to understand the underlying emotions and motivations of the employees in conflict.
- Hire people who you believe will add value to your organization with their willingness to problem solve and debate, people who are willing to act boldly and who are not concerned about being well-liked.
- Provide employees with education and training in interpersonal communication, healthy conflict resolution, non-defensive communication, and problem-solving skills.
- Deal with unresolved conflict promptly, equitably, and in a healthy manner.

Understanding the Causes of Workplace Conflict

For a team to work together effectively, conflicts need to be resolved in a timely and professional manner that minimizes disruption to productivity. The ability to resolve team conflicts is crucial to the success of any organization. The key to resolving conflict is identifying and understanding what causes conflict. That understanding allows leadership to put protocols in place to manage conflict.

Common causes of workplace conflict are:

- Organization culture
- Unmet needs in the workplace
- Perceived inequities of resources
- Unclear roles and responsibilities
- Competing job duties
- Downsizing, slow business, merger or acquisition
- Mismanagement of organizational change
- Workplace behaviors regarded by some co-workers as irritating
- Personality differences
- Poor communication, including misunderstood remarks and comments taken out of context
- Differences over work methods or goals
- Differences in perspectives attributable to age, sex or background

Categorizing Conflicts

Conflict can be further categorized:

- Task-based conflicts
- Leadership conflicts
- Work style conflicts
- Personality clashes

Task-based conflicts – occur in situations when team members rely on each other to successfully complete a task or project. When one person on the team is unable to complete their part of the task, it can affect another team member's ability to finish their part on time. Task-based conflict can arise if the team member lacks the skills, does not have a clear picture of project, does not have the time due to being overcommitted, time mismanagement, or even an undisclosed issue, just to name a few.

If you are in a position of responsibility, you can take steps to avoid these types of conflict by ensuring that everyone on your team understands what needs doing so tasks can be accomplished efficiently and on time. Create an atmosphere that allows team members to discuss the obstacles that prevent them from completing tasks in a timely manner so the team can adjust accordingly.

Leadership conflicts – occur because of differences in leadership style, and how individuals respond to a particular style. Some leaders micro-manage, some are collaborative, some deliver orders, some are open and encourage group effort, some less so. Their style is reflected in how individuals work with others or navigate their relationships. Whether you are in a management role or part of a team, you should be aware of your own leadership style, acknowledge how you work best, and how you interact with others on your team.

Every leader and team member needs to “clue in” and “tune in” to the personalities and work style of other individuals. No one can force everyone to fit into a mold. People tend to thrive when team culture bends to fit different communication, thinking and working styles. Everyone thrives in the recognition of the unique contributions of individual members.

Everyone develops their smarts and skills in different ways.

To work and achieve results collaboratively, you may have to fine-tune (not necessarily change it completely) your leadership style to accommodate the different needs and personalities of your team members, as well as to adjust to different situations. You may have to educate yourself on how to bridge the gap between what leadership entails and how your role might be different than it was in your previous area of responsibility or how it differs from other managers that work with your team.

Work style conflicts – there are differences in work styles or preferences in how individuals accomplish tasks. Not everyone works at the same speed. Some individuals work quickly, some slowly and mindfully. Some are self-starters and can work with very little direction or clarification, while others may need guidance along the way. The best way to avoid these types of conflicts is to recognize that everyone’s work style is different and find ways to collaborate to achieve the same goal despite those differences.

Personality clashes – personality clashes are common types of team conflicts. It might be a perfectly boring world if we all had the same or similar personalities. You are not going to get along perfectly with everyone at work and it can be challenge to work with a supervisor or peer whose personality clashes with your own. However, it is incredibly important – and it also might be an eye-opener – to try to understand the differences and learn how to work together peacefully and productively.

Identifying the Commonality to Resolve Clashes

The causes of conflicts outlined above are typical in the workplace. Basic conflicts such as disagreements over goals, methods or needs of the team are also commonplace.

The key to managing workplace conflict effectively is to seek ways to convert all conflict into meaningful encounters, or at the very least win-win situations for everyone involved. For the entrepreneur, manager or team leader that means it is not an option to ignore conflict of any kind. Stifling input from the parties in conflict is not an option. Doing so could have negative impact on an organization as well

as the individuals. Productivity and morale can only be maintained or advanced when conflicts are addressed and mutual understanding is reached.

Mutual understanding begins when the organization and its employees are aligned in recognizing that conflict can be constructive and meaningful. This shared approach helps the parties raise issues and participate in meaningful discussion to identify shared aims.

The first commonality might actually be easy to identify. "We both want to end the conflict!" From that starting point, the individuals can begin to brainstorm ways to meet that one common goal, and along the way, seek to identify other commonalities.

My Business has No Disagreement or Dissension

First of all, that scenario may not be possible.

There may be several reasons why people do not participate in appropriate workplace conflict. Shyness, lack of conviction, or lack of confidence. However, if you manage an environment where employees fail to speak up to disagree or where debate is non-existent ask yourself, "Are my employees or managers stifled?" What great ideas are not voiced aloud? And why? And what can be done to make it better?

Examine Your Workplace Environment

If you experience little disagreement or dissension in your group something may not be right.

- Observe for tension, secret meetings, or meetings behind closed doors.
- Solicit constructive criticism.
- Listen for negatives.
- Examine your own actions, or that of senior leadership. Do you or your managers send verbal or non-verbal messages that may be saying "It is really not okay to disagree?"
 - Do you put employees in a "hot seat" when they express an opinion?
 - If they make a bad decision or a predicted solution fails to work, do they get in trouble?
 - Are employees accepting decisions without question to avoid confrontation?
 - Are they agreeing in meetings and then going behind your back to complain or engage in exchanging nasty emails?
- Examine how conflict was dealt with in the past? When differences were resolved, did everyone come away feeling it was a win-win?
- What can you adjust to create an environment that encourages free speech and meaningful conflict?

Those are some serious questions that every entrepreneur or leader should ask.

In an effort to avoid group conflict, your tactics may be sending the wrong message to your people. If you believe you want different opinions expressed and do not get the responses you expect, you may have to adjust your approach or your company policies. Your company and its employees will always benefit from education and training in interpersonal communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and particularly, non-defensive communication.

When speaking of win-win we mean “I win and you win”. In discussing conflict resolution, the style of resolving the conflict – compromise versus negotiation – has a detrimental effect on the outcome as well as the overall attitude and support of the individuals involved in the conflict. We will explore that subject next.

Compromise Versus Collaborative Negotiation

Is it a negotiation or a compromise? Let us clarify this use of the words negotiation and compromise.

Negotiation

In simple terms, negotiation is a discussion aimed at reaching an agreement that will result in mutual benefits and the best possible outcome. In a negotiation, people settle differences and it is common that each person gets something in exchange for giving something the other party wants.

There are different styles of negotiation: competitive, collaborative, compromising, avoiding, accommodating. These five styles take into account how a person behaves during a negotiation, how they act towards the other party, and what they feel is the most important outcome for the negotiation.

We see evidence of these negotiating styles in business or international affairs. Bargaining is a form of competitive negotiation which we see a lot when contracts involving money are on the line. In some traditional societies their negotiations are based primarily on the values and needs of the relationship, not who gets what piece of the pie or how much money is involved. When we witness collaborative negotiation, we see countries aiming for a win-win scenario where there has to be mutual benefits for long term success. In contrast we also witness the scorched-earth policies where one party gets as much as they can irrespective of whether the other side benefits or not.

In this guide we will delve into two styles of negotiation: compromise and collaborative. We favour collaborative negotiation and we explain why.

Downfall of Compromise

Negotiation is not compromise. Yet compromising is the style of negotiation that many people think of as negotiation. In compromise, neither partner actually gets what they want. Critics believe compromise is an ill-advised style of negotiation because vital issues or significant requirements are lost in the course of compromise and both sides are required to give up something in order to reach an agreement. They settle on some middle ground between two ends of an issue. But, as a result neither party is truly being satisfied which ultimately may perpetuate the problem. To resolve the issue quickly, some people end up accommodating. They outwardly "compromise," when, in fact, they feel very differently about the situation. These individuals may resent the resolution and this resentment can fester, leading to negative interactions in the workplace.

Iacocca found a way to transform Chrysler's goals into the same goals as the politicians. When the vote was taken, Chrysler got their loan guarantee. Chrysler paid back the loan in full three years later. Everyone came out a winner.

In any conflict resolution, the final decision may be one that is acceptable but not optimal, but the ideal outcome is based on trying to achieve harmony.

Benefits of Collaborative Negotiation

In the long term, the "I win, you win" approach is better on so many levels:

1. The negotiation instills trust and cooperation because the negotiation strategy hinges on two main premises:
 - It starts from a level-playing field and
 - Everyone understanding that their objective is to get a win-win scenario.
2. It is based on "fair-process". As humans we have a profound need for fairness.
3. It speaks to the leaders who value relationships.
4. Universally, it is deemed an applicable method for negotiating personal and professional disputes.
5. Each person has an equal say in the relationship and is not being deprived or cheated.
6. Each person has an opportunity to feel like they are giving something to both the relationship and the outcome, which makes them feel more engaged and committed to the agreement, which means each party feels better about the other person and they tend to treat each other better.
7. Collaborative negotiation allows all parties the opportunity to propose creative solutions.

Ensuring that both parties come away feeling like winners is simply good business!

Practice Professional Courage – Take the Lead to Resolve Personal Conflict before it Spirals out of Control

When conflict looms, do you have a strategy for dealing with it? Taking the lead is the best approach. This type of approach has one directive:

Decide in advance that you will respond in healthy ways when you become personally involved in a disagreement or clash with a coworker, client, or manager.

Your goal is to adjust your attitude toward conflict. You make the decision and assume control of your reactions. Of course, this approach works in your personal relationships with loved ones or friends, too. Once your decision is made, you can count on these three purposeful tactics to solidify your resolve and help respond in healthy ways:

Shift Your Perspective of Conflict

Adjust your Attitude - Count on 3 Tactics

1. Conflict is not an obstacle.
2. Conflict resolution is my priority.
3. Conflict is an opportunity for me to grow.

1. Conflict is not an obstacle. It is your attitude to conflict that is essentially the problem.

2. Conflict resolution is my priority. Consider whether the issue is really worth your time and energy. Ask yourself, “Is it really important to win or “be right” in the current situation?” Instead of arguing or trying to convince anyone of anything, simply let others know what your thoughts are, and that is it. Do not judge or generalize.

If you are unable to come to an agreement, at least agree to disagree and be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint. Besides, if you allow the other person to win the argument, the dispute is over so much faster. Focus on life’s bigger issues and “put today’s concerns into context.” Always be polite and helpful to your subordinates as well as your bosses. Respect and acknowledge the positions, roles and duties of others.

3. Conflict is an opportunity for me to grow. Conflict is a call for change or adjustment. Some changes do not happen except through conflicts. Therefore, you must not just go through conflict, you must grow through conflict.

Let us look at conversation as an example of a way to grow through conflict. Imagine that you have an unplanned difficult conversation. You feel a surge of emotion afterward. It might be a boost to your confidence if it went well. Possibly, you feel regret or shame if the conversation went poorly. After such encounters, it is wise to reflect and learn from your experiences, trying to identify ways of improving future unplanned difficult conversations.

When you are involved in a conflict it is easy to become emotional and fall victim to common decision making errors. It is better to approach conflict with confidence and calm, rather than avoiding it all together or allowing conflict to escalate. It is much easier to be calm if you think of conflict as a stage before advancing to a higher level of thinking or adapting. Shift your perspective to see conflict as something more purposeful beyond the doom and gloom of seeing it as an ending.

- View the situation you are facing as a puzzle to solve. What are the possibilities? What are your choices?
- Imagine how a strong leader – someone you admire – might handle this situation. Would they use humour? Would they sit back and simply do a lot of listening first?
- You notice when your stomach growls to tell you should get a bite to eat. Think of your brain that way. There goes my brain releasing those cortisol hormones again.
- You might ask yourself these questions to shift your own perspective.

“What do I believe is an acceptable outcome for the other party?”

“Did I check my ego at the door?”

“Am I being polite? Using appropriate language?”

“Am I keeping my eye on the big picture?”

“I really doubt that I can do anything about this, right now. What is one small step I might take to calm the situation?”

“What small part of that might I work on now, that will leave me feeling a bit more happy?”

“I was able to achieve a similar goal in the past. How might I use that approach now?”

“They don’t seem to like me. What do I like about myself?”

“I’m such a perfectionist. How might being a perfectionist help me through this moment?”

“This always seems to happen to me. Perhaps it’d would be useful to explore how I somehow do this to myself too?”

It is certainly much more purposeful to view growth as a way of resolving conflict than giving up or becoming uncontrollably upset. Many relationships, marriages, partnerships, and alliances are ruined because the parties involved are too impatient to “allow conflicts to grow them”. When you are able to resolve conflict in a relationship, it builds trust. You can feel secure knowing your personal or working relationship can survive challenges and disagreements.

Think about how you have approached conflict in the past. Have you tried different approaches or different behaviors? Since every situation and every person you encounter can be very distinct, you using the same approach or style of behaving for every encounter may put you at a severe disadvantage. Even in collaborative negotiation, you will have to employ different approaches to fit the situation or the people involved.

When you find it necessary to resolve a conflict please consider using a collaborative approach. Even when you are in a position of power, be sure to acknowledge the perspective of the other person, and invite him or her to express viewpoints, suggest alternatives, and react to any proposal you may make. To add another layer of fairness to the outcome and to help the other person develop a more positive view of the process, take extra time to provide detailed explanations for actions or outcomes that were unappealing to the other person.

Use your Sensory Rescue Kit in Conflict

Think back to the last time you were stressed out. Your muscles tightened. Your stomach constricted, your hands and jaw clenched, your breathing became shallow, and your heart pumped faster. Your blood pressure skyrocketed. When you are involved in conflict, you experience immense stress. Your hormones kick in and it is easy to become overwhelmed by your emotions. By reducing stress during a conflict you are better able to deal effectively with the other person or group.

Learn and practice these two core skills to help you reduce stress.

1. Quick Stress Relief
2. Emotional Awareness:



1. Quick Stress Relief

It is the ability to relieve stress quickly, in the moment so to speak, that allows you to respond to conflict in healthy ways. You need to be calm to do that. You must learn how to stay centered and in control of yourself, so that you will not become overwhelmed when a conflict arises.

Talking with a caring listener in a tranquil environment can help you quickly calm down and release tension. However, in the heat of the moment, it can be difficult to excuse yourself to talk to your best friend. Same with taking a long walk or meditation exercises to reduce stress. When you are overly angry, keyed up, or impatient to respond without pausing to consider the consequences, you need something immediate to get your emotions in check.

What's in your sensory rescue toolbox? One of the fastest ways to relieve stress is to use your senses as a rescue tool – sight, smell, touch, touch, sound. You can also use movement.

How do you do that? Think of it this way. When you are in the midst of a conversation and get distracted by the brightness of the sun, making it hard to see around you, you close the blinds, maybe change your position, or in some instances you may put on sunglasses. When you are more comfortable you easily resume normal conversation. Likewise, when the music or an action scene on Netflix is too loud you normally find it easy to adjust the volume and the show goes on with little interruption. Think of using your sensory toolbox in much the same.

You may have to explore a variety of sensory experiences to identify which works best for you as a rescue tool. Could it be that a particular piece of art, a photo of a beach or a spider plant on your desk soothes you? Maybe it's wiggling your toes, a whiff of your favorite cologne, the taste of a piece of chocolate, or the feel of the pulse on your wrist that brings down your adrenaline and stress hormones. Be as precise as possible in identifying what works best.



View our list of 31 sensory actions for inspiration. Let your imagination run free. Experiment with different techniques. Possible the intensity of the sensation or repeating it does the trick. When you find the right sensory technique, you will know it. You will feel a sense of assuredness knowing you will always have that rescue tool to relieve stress on the spot.

1. You can handle a pebble, sea shell or reminiscent object to feel its weight or texture and bring good memories to the forefront.
2. Tactile fidgets are not just a passing fad. Fidgets keep the hands occupied in repetitive motor movements that can involve spinning, squeezing, pushing, pulling, clicking (you get the point!). The repetition of these small movements has a calming effect.
3. Keep a ball of cotton, twist tie, feather, small comb, piece of Velcro, or soft rubber eraser in your pocket so you will have something handy to feel or manipulate with your fingers when you feel stressed.
4. Keep a beanbag handy for tossing in the air, into a basket, or simple tossing from one hand to the other. Maybe keep three beanbags handy because you can juggle.
5. Chewing, sucking, and blowing are all motor movements that, when used as your ease in conjunction with other sensory activities, can play a key role in calming your emotions. While blowing soap bubbles may not be feasible, consider silent whistling. You could use a straw in your to-go cup. The act of reaching for it and sucking in water might do the trick. Play with the saliva in your mouth or chew on something crunchy or chewy. Simply inhale deeply through your nose and exhale air through pursed lips. If chewing on gum or sucking on a lollipop settles your emotions when conflict looms, do it.
6. Seek out a pleasant smell or take a whiff of something that jolts or excites your olfactory senses – flowers, scented candle, perfume, jar of spices.
7. Perhaps you find a nibble of chocolate or popcorn soothing.
8. Sometimes just hearing some tunes with a good beat are enough to get you moving. If there is background music in your location use. When you cannot jump, clap, run, twirl, or bounce to the beat of a song that makes you happy you can imagine your favourite song in your head and pause long enough to settle down, as if you had swayed in dance to the music.
9. Perhaps the sound of snapping your fingers, tapping your fingers on your desk, or the opening and closing of a Velcro watch band could be the sound that trigger relief.

10. Doodle.
11. Riffle the pages of a book.
12. Redirect your mind and body by shifting your body position.
13. Cuddle a pet.
14. Light a candle and watch the flame.
15. Write down your feelings.
16. Rub your temples or pull on your ear lobes.
17. Pause and tell someone you love them.
18. Get a hug.
19. Sip a warm drink.
20. Look out the window or let in fresh air.
21. Position a personalized item as a visual cue in a prominent place on your desk, shelf or wall so you can focus on it for self-regulation.
22. Sooth your hands with lotion, rub ice on your skin.
23. Steeple your fingers and pressing your palms together. Intertwine your fingers outward or inward and twist. Wring your hands.
24. Cross your arms and scratch your elbows.
25. Create an opportunity to pause long enough to run your fingers along the leaves of a plant on your desk.
26. Adjust the lighting.
27. Change where you sit in the space in relation to the others in the room.
28. Stretch out your body, focusing on the neck, shoulders, and legs. Do push-ups.
29. Stop and play detective. What is going on around you that's triggering the stress? Delve beyond the obvious.
30. Excuse yourself and taking a short walk outdoors for a change of scenery or go into another room to put your feet in the air and breath. Try a yoga pose or brush your hair. Physical activity during and right after an overwhelming situations has been proven helpful for people to adapt to or prevent anxious situations from getting out of hand.



Certain physical movements that provide feedback to the vestibular and proprioceptive systems are particularly beneficial. The vestibular system includes the parts of the inner ear and brain that process the sensory information involved with your sense of balance and spacial orientation for the purpose of coordinating movement with balance and controlling eye movement. Your proprioceptive systems are the senses of position and movement of your limbs and trunk, the sense of effort, the sense of force, and the sense of heaviness. Receptors involved in proprioception are located in skin, muscles, and joints.

Make Quick Stress Relief a Habit!

Anything similar to the suggestions above can change the way you feel. Quick stress relief is not just useful in conflict. You can draw upon your sensory rescue toolbox whenever you experience stress. If a photo of your baby or the taste of chocolate is your rescue tool, make sure to always keep them handy. The more you avail yourself of the advantage of quick stress relief, the more it becomes a good habit.

The Power of Imagination.

In fact, quick stress relief using your sensory rescue toolbox will become so much of a habit that when stress or conflict strikes, you will eventually simply imagine the vivid sensations of your rescue tool and you will experience the same calming or bracing effects on your brain as seeing the photo of your child or tasting the chocolate. When you can recall a strong sensation, you will never be without a quick stress relief tool. How handy is that?

2. Emotional Self-Awareness

Do you pay attention to your emotions? Do you reflect on why they are happening? Can you recognize and make sense of one emotion after another as your experiences change from moment to moment or situation to situation? Emotional awareness means you learn from your feelings quickly and you can move through difficulties faster by using your emotions as a navigating tool. For example, if you feel sad, you can reflect on what makes you sad and from that make decisions that then help you. It also means you can predict emotions in advance – you know what actions will lead to what emotions and this means you can make better choices accordingly. For example, you can help yourself feel better by knowing what decisions lead to feeling good.

Your ability to handle conflict depends on your ability to connect to your emotions so you are able to react in constructive ways, even in the midst of a feeling vulnerable or powerless. If you do not know how or what you feel in a certain way, you will find it difficult to communicate effectively or resolve disagreements.

Being Self-Aware is a Rare Quality – above all it is a Skill

Many of us get bogged down in daily activities and do not make it a priority to take time out from our harried schedules to become observers of our own lives and who we are being. Self-awareness is about being in tune with what you know and understand about your own character, feelings, motives and desires. In your reach for authenticity and living a meaningful life, acquiring self-awareness is one of the biggest gifts you can give yourself. This is by no means saying that you look inward because something is broken and needs fixing or that you need to change your life. You look inward to get to know the “true you” to better understand how to avoid stress, communicate more effectively, make sounder decisions, and build strong relationships.

Internal and External Self-Awareness

There are two broad categories of self-awareness: internal self-awareness and external self-awareness.

Internal self-awareness leads to understanding with clarity what makes you feel a certain way. When you feel off-kilter, anxious or angry it could be because you haven't taken an inside look at the "what". By practicing internal self awareness you can clearly see how your ethics, passions or aspirations fit with your environment. You learn how your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses – and the reactions that stem from them – can clash with or impact on people around you. With self-awareness you can gain control of your emotions in stressful situations that can cause conflict.

External self-awareness is your ability to clearly see how other people perceive you, your attitude and responses to them as individuals. Are you aware of how your tone of voice or choice of words affects



other people? External self-awareness typically allows you to be more empathetic which is reflected in your abilities as a leader, in maintaining stronger relationships, and in taking control of tense or controversial situations.

It is not Easy Looking Inward

When you decide to become more self-aware, you choose to see just the real you, apart from your work, home, or environment. You look inside yourself to pinpoint the emotions, motivations, and triggers that initiate both your positive and negative feelings.

Seriously, how often do you just sit and ponder the truth that is within you. Is it possible that you get so preoccupied with what others are thinking and doing that you fail to do yourself justice as a source of insight?

When you are faced with an issue do you use Google or social media as your go-to guide for answers? Think about it. Knowledge is not insight.

Insight is your ability to make sense of a situation, identify and distill what you learn, develop your own judgement, and figure things out. Instead of being preoccupied with one-click answers, carve out some time to listen to your inner voice. Your goal is actually simple – to be the best version of yourself.

Self-Awareness is not Fixed

Your self-awareness is not fixed. As you develop your personal character strengths, various abilities, and knowledge of the world, you will also always enhance your self-awareness to discover something interesting and exciting about yourself.

An ongoing fifty-year study conducted by Harvard researchers has consistently revealed that though most people *believe* they are self-aware, only 10-15% of the people studied actually fit the criteria. People in leadership roles lack self-awareness in competencies measured in such things as emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, empathy, trustworthiness, and leadership performance.

Each moment in your life is an opportunity to be introspective and listen to your inner voice. The insights you gain matter to everything you do, every relationship you have, how you feel about yourself, how these things ultimately affect you as well as others, and how you take responsibility for your positive emotions, your flaws and problems, and most importantly improve what matters to you and help you grow as an individual.

Give these next suggestions or questions about your self-awareness some serious thought and think how just one aspect of any relationship or one part of your day could be better or easier if you decided to apply just five minutes of more self-awareness to your daily interactions.

- Ask yourself “what” questions and find good answers.
 - What am I trying to achieve?
 - What am I doing that is working?
 - What am I doing that is slowing me down?
 - What can I do to change?



Highly self-aware people ask, “What?” not “Why?” Asking “What” provides more productive focus on objectives and future goals rather than on mistakes. When you ask “why” you will focus on a fault, misjudgement, or blunder. That kind of thinking leaves you open to negative, suspicious, or critical thoughts, that can be depressing and unproductive.

Asking “what” guides you to recognizing factors that may be outside your control and may not align with what is important to you. Asking “what” leads to you being able to strategize how to fix situations rather than ruminate on “whoa is me” negatives.

- Can you look at your feelings and behaviours from a third-person perspective and then make rational judgements on them? Make lists, a balance sheet, or a chart of your abilities, character strengths, weaknesses, limitations, liabilities, and problem behaviours.
 - You need a complete picture. You do that by getting different perspectives of how others perceive you. Listen to the important people in your life to get a true picture. Ask for input on what you might have missed or viewed differently. Assess what you can improve or learn, how, or from whom.
 - Allow yourself to be vulnerable, ask for feedback from people you work with or lead or care about.
- Anytime you make an important decision, assess it by noting your thoughts and motivations during the decision-making process.
 - Every time you gain a new strength diarize it. Track the progress of your character over time. You may employ other methods. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of who you are, what you want, and how those things overlap or conflict with how you behave, think, and feel.
- Spend time with yourself in silence. It is exceedingly difficult to self-reflect when you are distracted by a television, phone, or friends. Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness allows you to be present with yourself and observe your thoughts in a non-judgemental way. What better way to become self-aware than focusing, non-judgementally, on you. Can you be candid about who you are?
 - Spend time reading, writing, meditating, or practicing other solo activities to connect with the authentic you.
 - Try to give yourself 30 quiet, distraction-free minutes a day. That may seem to be a big ask, but try.

- Everyone is afraid of judgement. It's how you respond that matters. Next time you make an error, just say so. It takes but a few seconds to say, "My bad," or "I misjudged the situation," and move on since there are many more minutes and hours in the day to deal with. Work and relationships are complicated enough, why add more obstacles like lies or guilt!

In summary, self-awareness is crucial to creating more opportunities to enhance those things that matter most to you. Without self-awareness, proficiency in the most other competencies becomes difficult to deploy consistently. As you become more self-aware, you'll be able to reach a new level of contentment. Self-awareness helps you manage your emotions better, helps you become a better leader, improve relationships and develop the uniqueness that gives your life more meaning.

Emotional self-awareness isn't something that you achieve once and then you're done with it. Rather, every moment is an opportunity to either be self-aware or not. It is a continual endeavor, a conscious choice to be self-aware. The good news is that the more you practice it, the easier it becomes.

Create a Refuge Corner

Create a refuge corner in your office or home. Set a specific time of day, every day, to spend 15 minutes in your sensory refuge.



If you work in an office eight hours a day there may be a pattern to your stress build-up every day. Plugging into your sensory relief mode before that cycle begins is a good way to fend off stress. If you work from home you might consider using this time to transition from "work" mode to "relaxed before dinner" mode or "homeschooling teacher" mode. When you need to calm yourself you go to your refuge, or think about the calming effects of that space. You can use your refuge corner to practice introspection.

When you do not have a dedicated area for a sanctuary, create a focus point, reposition a chair, or set lighting to change a multi-purpose space into your refuge corner. A spot outdoors must be ideal for you. All you really need is a comfortable place to sit and relax and some reminiscent item that grounds you.

How to Navigate Through Conflict Resolution as a Problem-Solving Tactician

Resolving conflict in the workplace requires a tactician who has an outside perspective because neutrality and an open mind help mediators to establish trust, credibility, and respect. The wise negotiator establishes the relationship before proceeding further. Even so, it can be difficult to navigate through conflict.

Negotiation Starts on a Level Playing Field

If you are tasked with resolving a dispute, you have to remain impartial, setting aside your opinions, feelings, and agendas. Even if you have a relationship with the people involved, you have to give equal consideration to each side. Everyone must be given the chance to tell their story and talk about their positions and concerns. You have to remain calm and in control of your own emotions and body language as you work to understand the positions of the conflicting parties and address their individual differences.



Consider Underlying Factors

Here are some of the underlying factors to consider when you are called upon to resolve conflict.

- People are usually stuck in how they see the situation. One party may view itself like a hero in battle against a hostile force or they view the other side as not having legitimate concerns or a valid point of view. If the dispute involves management, leaders may be viewed as too powerful.
- When parties are unwilling or unable to clarify their side of the conflict you may have to ask the right questions to identify what triggered the conflict and what factors caused the dispute to escalate.
- Besides listening to what each person has to say, you have to be able to read the verbal and nonverbal communication cues.

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- Someone may be unwilling to resolve the dispute. If both parties are competitive and intent on pursue their own needs – even when this means others suffer – they may lock horns in a competitive battle, which could end in a deadlock. Appeasing competitive negotiators does not always create goodwill. Similarly, giving in to bullying tactics only rewards the bully and increases the chances they will rely on bully tactics in the future. You do not want to set a precedent that creates an atmosphere that induces demands for more concessions.

Find Underlying and Unstated Issues



- The dispute may be evidence of a pattern that over time has resulted in one individual or a faction of individuals using conflict to always get their way. You may have to delve into the particulars of other conflict and negotiations to identify if a group is determination to take advantage of other people's willingness to compromise.
- When the conflict stems from previously unresolved issues you have several problems to sort out and other people to cope with.
- Besides the constraints of your authority or budget you have to take consider that the overall moral of the workplace is at risk if you do not resolve the issue in a timely manner.
- You cannot force an agreement.

You may have to delve into any underlying factors that cloud the issue before you find a lasting solution or the common ground that enables everyone to work together peacefully. You also have to be able to reframe the issue in a more neutral way so that parties are more likely to listen to and understand the other side's viewpoint. This is not only a huge responsibility it requires discipline, diplomacy and an open mind. When you resolve conflict, you will need to be sensitive to justice and the potential hostility of the workplace.

Resolve Conflict Like a Pro Through Collaboration

When conflict arises, first remain calm. Determine if you are the right person to handle the situation. If you are unable to handle conflict in any particular situation, engage a person outside the conflict to act as mediator. Make sure the person can provide an objective perspective. If you are the person dealing with the issue make it a priority and set aside time to deal with it properly. The wise negotiator establishes the relationship before proceeding further and never invalidates any person's viewpoint or lays blame.

1. Discuss the conflict in a quiet and private place, free of distractions. Providing time and space for discussion can facilitate a resolution.



2. Agree prior to sitting down together, that the purpose of the meeting is to resolve the conflict. When you make this agreement, all parties arrive prepared. Acknowledge that a problem exists and encourage all parties to agree that there is a problem and that a resolution should be reachable with their participation. You may have to speak to the parties separately to understand more or convince them to be involved in the mediation.
3. Agree to find a resolution. Determine what outcomes you'd like to see as a result of the discussion. A better working relationship? A better solution to the problem? Increased alternatives for successful projects? A broadened understanding of each person's needs and wants? Thoughtful solutions and outcomes are plentiful when the parties brainstorm for solutions.
4. Begin by allowing each party to express their point of view. The purpose of the exchange is to make sure both parties clearly understand the viewpoint of the other. Make sure each party ties their opinions to facts, where possible. This is not the time to discuss the issues so much as taking the time to ask questions for better understanding, and for the parties to truly hear the other's viewpoint.

5. Take the time for everyone to listen and work to understand the perspective of everyone involved. Often problems are simply misunderstandings. Clarification can often end the need for conflict resolution. Listen carefully to discussions to identify opportunities for negotiation and a possible solution.
6. Agree on the difference in the points of view. Be aware of and respect differences. Encourage people to be open about their real wants and needs for reaching a solution. Pay attention to the feelings being expressed as well as the spoken word of others.
7. Reframe the issue, so the parties involved listen and understand the opposing viewpoints. Your goal in reframing is to help the individuals see things differently and feel empowered to act. Address the conflict from the various angles before you zero in on finding a solution. In reframing be specific about:
 - What contributes to the problem?
 - What contributes to the solution?
8. Reframing allows you to introduce the solution strategies at the proper time to maximize collaboration and support from the negotiators. A resolution might include apologies, changes in behavior, a change in policies or procedures to prevent recurrence. In a negotiation, all parties involved must come away feeling the process was fair, they have not been cheated or compromised, and that they have contributed to the solution and the decision was not forced upon them. Remember the win-win.
9. Be sure to identify the real cause of the conflict. In doing so, focus on the issues, not the personalities of the participants. People may have heightened emotions due to work conditions, deadlines, extra long hours, family, health, hunger, burnout, client demands, etc. The parties must agree on the problem together before you can facilitate their search for a solution.
10. Explore and discuss potential solutions and alternatives. A brainstorming session might be helpful to identify possibilities. Build a discussion that is positive and powerful for all parties. Make sure you discuss the positive and negative possibilities of each suggestion before any party rejects any suggested solution. Keep the parties focused on their individual needs and wants and those of the other party. After all, if one party wins, that means the other party loses. People who feel as if they have lost will not be happy nor will they be effective coworkers.
11. Agree on a plan for resolution or a plan to address differences. Agree on what each person will do to solve the conflict. Set clear goals and know how you will measure success.
12. Follow up to make ensure that everyone is following the agreed-upon plan and monitor the impact of any agreements for change.
13. Hold people responsible for their actions. If the conflict continues because parties fail to cooperate you must act responsibly.

Essential Conflict Resolution Skills

You will achieve effective conflict resolution using a combination of several skills and attributes working together. In the previous pages we did mention several skills that are handy to have when resolving conflict: remaining calm, maintaining control of one's emotions, being fair, asking the right questions, negotiation, and diplomacy to name a few. Since conflict exists in our world, it would do you well to become skilled in the art of negotiation or conflict resolution. Conveniently, these skills will not only help you in any leadership capacity, they will serve you well in your personal life.

First, one of the most important things to recognize in conflict resolution is your own bias or limitations. If you are unable to handle the situation fairly because you are part of the conflict, have strong opinions that make it difficult to be neutral, please do everyone a favour and engage a person outside the conflict to act as mediator. Make sure the person can provide an objective perspective.



Conflict can be complex and demanding. There are seven indispensable skills that can help you make conflict resolution less stressful, more clear-cut and effective. Hone and exercise these skills for when you experience conflict and wish to resolve it, or when you are called upon to mediate a conflict.

1. Be conspicuous and genuine: Constructive negotiation is based on a foundation of honesty, integrity and dignity. These are conspicuous qualities and you are best positioned to negotiate if the other party respects you as a human being. You should not proceed with any type of negotiation unless you have established a relationship that is genuinely open and sincere. When other people try to disguise their deceit, manipulation, or dishonesty, our human spider senses kick in and we can sense their duplicity. Never underestimate other people detecting if you are insincere or secretive. These are palpable traits that cannot be hidden.

2. Be Open-minded: Seeing things in only black and white creates limited thinking. Your ability to understand someone else's point of view and provide an objective perspective will go a long way in solving most any conflict. Being open-minded means you are aware of and respect differences.

3. Listen Actively: To truly understand all sides of any dispute you must be able to listen effectively, withhold judgment and be empathetic.

We provide a lot of advice to help you improve your listening skills.

4. Learn the Language of Non-Verbal Communication: Researchers in nonverbal communication claim that as much as 60 percent of the meaning transmitted between two people in face-to-face communication is nonverbal. The language of nonverbal communications includes studying your own gestures and body language as well as being aware of what your counterpart is conveying. One of the keys of communication is not singling out one word as being the whole meaning of the conversation. The same holds true for interpreting non-verbal communication cues. Tone of voice, posture and gestures give you clues. You must be careful because any one of these may be very difficult to understand out of context. You must ensure you are matching the verbal communication with the non-verbal to put things in the right framework of understanding. We all exhibit involuntary body signals through eye contact, gestures, posture, body movement, tone, touch and space. Often, different parts of the body – face, head, hands, arms, and legs work in clusters to send signals. For example, a person might fidget, avoid eye contact, and bite their lips, while tapping their fingers on the table. Learning to interpret how these different parts of the body react or involuntarily change during conversation is a valuable skill. Also, your non-verbal cues can complement or contradict the message you are trying convey, thus indicating to your listener just how genuine you are.

Learn more about interpreting body language

5. Be Assertive: Being assertive in this context should not be synonymous with insolence or brazenness. Assertiveness goes hand in hand with your boldness in handling decisions that are based on you standing up for your own or other people's rights in a calm and positive way, without being aggressive or manipulative. It means expressing your thoughts, emotions, beliefs and opinions in an honest and appropriate way without undermining the rights of others or resorting to unreceptive or manipulative responses.

It takes boldness to take responsibility when you have made a mistake, too. For example, if you notice you have upset another person you show your assertiveness when you seek to address that with them as soon as possible. A manager could also realize there is a conflict taking place and make a bold decision to step in to resolve the conflict before it escalates.

Being assertive also means being polite. We may not always notice politeness but we usually notice rudeness or inconsiderate behaviour. Good manners cost nothing but can make a big difference in your relationship with people. In a calm and positive manner, you can refuse demands that you consider to be unreasonable, or which you are unable to meet. But, at the same time, you need to recognize the rights of others to make requests of you, and receive a polite response.

6. Be a Problem Solver: Problems are signals. They tell you something is wrong or is not working properly. Conflict is a sign of a problem. To be a problem solver requires another combination of skills that are broadly described as being able to exercise critical thinking skills to ask the right questions, evaluate information, and apply problem solving techniques to make informed decisions. Learning problem solving strategies helps you better understand and examine your options so you are able to make good decisions.

We provide good advice to help you improve your problem-solving skills.

7. Just Ask: Most people are too nervous or find it difficult to ask tough questions. Yet, when done correctly it is a powerful motivator for resolving issues. What are some tough questions?

Asking for the opportunity to sincerely apologize: If you say or do something that may be considered rude or embarrassing, then apologize. Admit when you are wrong or misguided and tell people that you are sorry.

Asking for the difficult conversation: Constantly putting off difficult conversations or situations often leads to feelings of frustration, guilt, self-disgust, anger, or insecurity, all of which add can add more stress and heighten conflict.

Here are two examples of difficult conversations:

- If you are in a leadership role you may recognize the signs of conflict and need to take the initiative to resolve it early.
- If you are involved in a stressful issue, have you ever considered that the other person may not know that you feel hurt, embarrassed, or have difficulty working with them. Remaining silent, solves nothing, but an open discussion about your feelings may dramatically improve the situation.

Asking for trust, cooperation, or honesty: Keep in mind, that when you ask for these things you should be prepared to genuinely reciprocate.

Asking for a person's time: You might be surprised by how supportive another person or group can be if you ask them to bear with you through a difficult time, or humour you while you go through a long or difficult explanation of a situation.

Asking for patience, understanding: Patience is the ability to stay calm while you are waiting for an outcome that you need or want. Patience and understanding toward others is essential in customer service, training new recruits, or when delegating difficult tasks. On the flipside, you may need to ask for patience and understanding as you work through overcoming a serious obstacle or setback in life, especially if circumstances are beyond your control.



Asking a person permission to participate or to give attention to a situation or issue: Our humanity has instilled within us an instinctive need to belong, which means we feel better when we are connecting and engaging with friends, families, coworkers, and community. Challenges at work can cause you to feel that you do not belong and that can cause undue stress which can escalate to conflict. Sometimes people do not realize who or what needs attention until you bring it to their attention. You have to put in equal effort to belong and that might mean asking to be involved in some way.

Ask yourself hard-hitting questions: How committed are you to resolving conflict? What are you willing to question within yourself in order to maintain an open mind, a genuine character, and good relations in the workplace? Have you removed all roadblocks to resolving conflict? Ask yourself about your level of understanding or about your patience.

Ask for help: Sometimes we are too proud or too anxious to seek the support we need. We perceive a request for help as a sign of weakness. In reality, it is a sign of strength when you can ask for help. It is a sign that you are self-aware and self-assured enough to know when it's time to seek assistance to get a job done, or to work through personal issues that hinder how well you can do our job or handle problems. It is especially necessary to ask for help when you make a mistake, when you are bogged down with responsibilities or tasks, when you have no idea what to do, or when you need the expertise or insight of another person.

Why should you ask the tough questions:

- It helps you clarify information you do not understand.
- It allows you to get a firm yes or no.
- It allows you to provide information.
- Asking questions invites the other person to communicate.
- When the other party is shying away from discussion, asking the right questions in a proper polite manner can draw them back into conversation or negotiation.
- Asking personal questions can help you adjust your strategy by learning what makes the other person tick.
- If you are mediating, you never going to know just how far apart both sides are unless you ask.

Other Attributes and Skills that will aid Conflict Resolution

When we resolve conflict for ourselves or as a mediator, other leadership qualities and skills make the challenge much easier to handle. These abilities may be classified in broad categories such as soft skills, communication skills, or leadership skills. They are all fundamental skills and learnable, which is handy because they transcend the workplace to help us in our personal lives.

We list a few of them here without explanation and in no particular order. We suggest that if you would like to learn more, you explore our career training catalog and personal development guides.



- Ability to relate to others on a personal and professional level
- Maintaining control of one's emotions
- Verbal communication
- Timely communication
- Being ethical/fair
- Integrity/honesty
- Persuasion and influencing skills
- Being attentive
- Being articulate
- Avoiding gossip
- Confidentiality
- Using humour carefully
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Stress-management
- Relationship Building
- Patience
- Timely questions
- Diplomacy
- Empathy
- Critical thinking
- Analytical skills
- Confidence builder
- Active listening
- Reliability
- Dependability
- Creativity
- Positivity
- Effective feedback
- Team building
- Risk-taking
- Ability to teach and mentor
- Decisiveness
- Research
- Collaboration
- Realistic goal-setting
- Detail-oriented
- Transparency
- Motivation
- Helpfulness

Inspired and Committed, We Celebrate Your Journey

At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success