

7 Steps to Resolving Conflict



Whether in your professional life or your personal life, you are going to run into someone that is causing problems either for you directly, or for your group. Most people prefer to avoid conflict and end up harboring resentment, and get stressed out because the situation doesn't change. Here are a few simple steps to help you approach the person causing the conflict and resolving the situation or at least bring the problem to their attention.

1. Set up a private meeting with the person. If you call the person out in front of others it will only embarrass them. This will only cause them to become defensive and make a positive outcome very unlikely.
2. There are basically two types of mindsets people have; they are either LEARNERS or JUDGERS. Most of us go through life judging ourselves or others, but when you come to this meeting, come with the attitude of LEARNING and not JUDGING. If you go in with a judgmental attitude towards the person this too will get their defenses up very quickly. Instead, go in with the attitude that you want to learn what is going on with the person that is causing the disruptive behavior. You never know what might be going on in their life that may be causing the behavior.
3. Start by telling the other person how important they are to you and the team so they know they are valued.
4. Focus on the behavior that is causing the problem and not the person. Don't make general statements like "you are ALWAYS late", or "you NEVER follow through". Again, this comes across as very judgmental and sets the wrong tone for the meeting. Instead, simply state your observation such as "I've noticed that for the past 4 meetings you have been coming in late".

5. Let them know SPECIFICALLY how this behavior is causing problems for you or the team. Such as, “by coming in late it holds us all up from being able to finish the meeting on time so we can get back to work and it’s really not fair to the other team members” or “we end up having to go back over material that you missed and some of the other team members have complained that this is wasting their time”. Try to keep your comments to actual problems and keep emotions out of it.
6. Ask them if there is something going on with them that is causing the behavior and really listen to them. By giving them a chance to explain what is going on and offering to help if you can changes the tone of what could be a tense and unpleasant conversation into one that shows you are concerned about them and want to help.
7. If there is something you can do to help the situation, let them know what you are willing to do to help them resolve the problem. For example, if they are having a hard time getting to your meetings on time, consider changing the time of the meeting to better accommodate their schedule if the other team members agree. Ask them what they think they can do to improve things as well.
8. Do a quick summary of what both of you are willing to do and get a commitment to make the changes by a certain date. Also have them agree to meet with you again in a week or two to go over the progress on resolving the issue or see if there are other things that need to be done.

This same approach works if you are the one being confronted by someone that is irate or being judgmental. If you are the one being confronted:

1. Try to move the conversation to a more private location.
2. STAY IN A LEARNER MODE.
3. Tell them how much you value their contributions and that you want to understand their issue and resolve it.
4. Ask them for specific examples of the behavior that is troubling them.
5. Ask them what the impact of the behavior is and how it makes them feel.
6. Ask for their suggestions on what behavior they think would help.
7. Work with them to find a solution that works for both of you.

I hope these steps help in making your work environment more collaborative and efficient. I would love to hear back on your experience in using this technique.

Good luck!

Jeff King