Conflict Resolution

Workplace conflicts happen everywhere, and ignoring them can be costly. Every unaddressed conflict wastes about eight hours of company time in gossip and other unproductive activities. Moreover, it can lower morale, create resentment, and result in a good employee quitting their job.

Understanding the reasons behind workplace conflicts can help HR professionals tackle problems before or after a conflict turns into a face-off between departments that refuse to work together or a screaming match between colleagues.

Experts have found that the most effective teams are those in which members feel safe enough to disagree with one another. A culture where dissent is allowed, or even encouraged, can spur innovation, diversity of thought and better decision-making. The challenge is in figuring out which conflicts are healthy and which ones are harmful.

In an increasingly global and diverse workplace, sometimes the heart of the problem is that people differ from each other in age, gender, politics, culture, or personality type.

Human Resources professionals and conflict management experts recommend that HR get involved in workplace conflicts when:

* Employees are threatening to quit over the problem. Recruiting and training are expensive; it’s often cheaper to work out a solution.
* Disagreements are getting personal, and respect between employees is being lost.
* Conflicts are affecting morale and organizational success.

One of the biggest drivers of conflict is when people misinterpret others’ intentions. The introvert who stays quiet during an entire meeting and brings up a problem at the end is not trying to sabotage a co-worker; that behavior simply aligns with his personality type. A change in seating arrangements in the office isn’t a personal attack on someone, just a reorganization that may not have been thought through. Someone who’s not acting according to a person’s stereotyped expectations—like a woman who’s very assertive and thus behaves in a way that contradicts traditional notions of femininity—may just be being herself.

Conflict is inevitable because we’re human beings and come from different backgrounds and cultures. That’s why companies need to remember to bring people together to get to know each other. One of the benefits of the Welcome Breakfasts during orientation of new staff.

Developing effective conflict resolution skill sets are an essential component of a building a sustainable business model. Unresolved conflict often results in loss of productivity, the stifling of creativity, and the creation of barriers to cooperation and collaboration. Perhaps most importantly for leaders, good conflict resolution ability equals good employee retention. Leaders who don’t deal with conflict will eventually watch their good talent walk out the door in search of a healthier and safer work environment.

The following are common methods for addressing conflicts in the workplace:

1. **Define acceptable behavior, have clear expectations**
2. **Address issue immediately, don’t let resentment buildup**
3. Understand the other person’s position, put yourself in their shoes
4. Recognize what is an appropriate conflict to resolve, don’t be petty and pick fights
5. View conflict as an opportunity, let it be a learning experience for all parties

Ultimately, conflict resolution is based in human psychology. We all want to be heard. We all want to be to right. But using psychology, leaders in your company can help bring about compromise and reconciliation so that the company wins out.