



Conflict Resolution In The Workplace

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CONFLICT—WHETHER we'd like to admit it or not, it's an inevitable occurrence. When it comes to the workplace, conflict is a common thread,

unlike so many other areas in everyday life where conflict can arise, workplace conflict is one area that you cannot—and should not—ignore.

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weaving its way through each and every department without missing a beat. But

When it comes to job-related conflict, it's important to think in terms of resolution. To get to that point, however, steps should be taken to ensure the conflict is recognized, properly addressed, and rectified. So often when issues arise and conflict occurs, our first instinct is to avoid and ignore it. The problem with this method, though, especially when it comes to the workplace, is that when conflicts are avoided and not addressed head on, they can often have the potential to become much bigger problems than the original conflicts ever were.

Take, for example, a disagreement that occurs between two groups on a workplace team. The team members from each group have conflicting ideas on implementing a new procedure and cannot come to an agreement on which method would be most effective. The groups go back and forth during a workshop, each side presenting their case, debating the effectiveness of each method. When they cannot reach common ground, tensions become high and the team loses focus on the task at hand. They begin to argue more than debate, and the meeting spirals. Some team members suggest reaching out to their supervisor for further guidance and mediation.

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In this case, a common workplace disagreement has occurred: team members have presented differing ideas and cannot come to an agreement on what will work best. A few things have happened, though, that suggest this team is on the right track to identifying and resolving this conflict. First, the initial conflict between the groups on the team occurred. The team members tried to work to come to an agreement but were unsuccessful. Then, the groups began to veer off from debating, which suggested that the meeting was no longer productive. Sensing no solution to be found at the time, the team members called on their supervisor to step in to help the group resolve the situation.

Instead of tabling the workshop after reaching no common ground, the team decided to confront the situation head on and continued to deal with it. This shows a willingness to work towards a solution instead of avoiding it. If the team instead decided to abandon the project with no clear solution in mind, it could open the doors to more disagreement and ill will if team members feel they do not have enough respect for each other or openness to work with each other on their everyday tasks. Although the meeting spirals a bit when it moves more towards arguing rather than debating, that team members identified a need for an outside perspective in the form of their supervisor stepping in shows that they care enough to continue working together,

to have their ideas heard, and suggests that they at least have in mind a common goal of reaching a solution.

In this particular situation, pulling in their supervisor—or someone else who can offer clear insight and/or a nudge in the direction of conflict resolution—can be beneficial because it allows a person or persons with fresh perspective to analyze the conflict at hand and offer suggestions on how to go about compromising and/or collaborating in order to reach a common goal. It allows for more effective teamwork, even when groups present differing views, and often leads to a positive resolution, whether that be through a reworking of ideas, collaborating on a solution featuring aspects presented by each group, or brainstorming something entirely new with input from each side.

Although this is only one example of how a conflict is proactively navigated to reach a resolution, those same steps can be translated to any number of workplace issues, differences, or conflicts. Taking the proper steps to ensure conflicts are not avoided and are instead properly dealt with allows for a more positive workplace environment, where workers feel empowered and even encouraged to, at times, disagree. Not all conflict is bad, and in fact, when dealt with properly, conflict can often lead to a more collaborative and creative environment, where team members feel they can freely share ideas,

allow for debate, and come together to reach better solutions that stem from an initial difference.

It's important to remember that even when it can feel uncomfortable at times, conflict is bound to occur in the workplace, and it is best not to avoid dealing with it or ignoring it in hopes that it will go away. It is best to confront a conflict head-on, taking the steps necessary to recognize it for what it is, address it properly, and move forward from it with a sense that it has been rectified, that you are better off for having experienced it, and that you and those involved can learn from it as you go on. ■



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