

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Total Talent Management

Conflict Resolution – Creating an Effective Atmosphere

BE BOUNDLESS



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Creating an Effective Atmosphere



When people are involved in a conflict, there is typically a lot of negative energy. Anger, frustration, and disappointment are just a few of the emotions often felt. By establishing a positive atmosphere, we can begin to turn that negative energy around, and create a powerful problem-solving force. This creates a strong beginning for the conflict resolution process

Neutralizing Emotions

Before beginning the conflict resolution process, both parties must agree that they want to resolve the conflict. Without this crucial buy-in step, achieving a win-win solution is close to impossible.

Once participants have agreed to resolve the conflict, it is important to neutralize as many negative emotions as possible. This means giving the participants in the conflict time to vent and work through the feelings associated with the conflict.

Key steps for the people in conflict include:

- Accept that you have negative feelings and that these feelings are normal.
- Acknowledge the feelings and their root causes. Example: "I feel very angry about the way George spoke to me in that meeting."
- Identify how you might resolve your feelings. Example: "If George apologized to me, I would feel a lot better."
- This can generate ideas about what the root cause of the conflict is, and how to resolve it. Example: "George and I haven't been getting along very well since the merger. I wonder if he might be having some stress and anxiety."

Suggested Activity

Consider doing this activity with your team.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Objective	Understand how to turn negative emotions into positive energy.
Topic Summary	<p>Key steps for the people in conflict include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept that you have negative feelings and that these feelings are normal. • Acknowledge the feelings and their root causes. • Identify how you might resolve your feelings. • This can generate ideas about what the root cause of the conflict is, and how to resolve it.
Materials Required	One set of Opposite Emotion cards per ten participants.
Planning Checklist	<p>Write each emotion listed below on a single index card, so that you have a set of ten Opposite Emotion cards, each with a different emotion listed on it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy • Sad • Angry • Calm • Disappointed • Satisfied • Resentful • Thankful • Confused • Enlightened
Recommended Activity	<p>Divide participants into groups of ten. Give each group a set of cards and each person in the group one card. Explain that their task is to find the opposite emotion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy + Sad • Angry + Calm • Disappointed + Satisfied • Resentful + Thankful • Confused + Enlightened <p>Once they have found their opposite, they should brainstorm ways to turn that particular negative emotion into its positive opposite.</p>

Stories to Share	Think of the Chinese yin-yang symbol – how the black and white oppose and balance each other.
Delivery Tips	If your group does not have a multiple of ten participants, adjust the number of cards accordingly.

Setting Ground Rules

Ground rules provide a framework for people to resolve their conflict. Ground rules should be set at the beginning of any conflict resolution process. They can be very brief or very detailed – whatever the situation requires.

Ground rules should be:

- Developed and agreed upon by both parties.
- Positive when it is possible. (For example, “We will listen to each other’s statements fully,” rather than, “We will not interrupt.”)
- Fair to both parties
- Enforceable
- Adjustable
- Written and posted somewhere where both parties can refer to it (for more formal dispute resolution processes).

If the parties are using a mediator to help them resolve the conflict, it is important that the ground rules be developed by the parties and not the mediator. The mediator’s role is that of a guide and mentor, not a judge or supreme ruler.

Some examples of ground rules include:

- We will listen to each other’s statements fully before responding.
- We will work together to achieve a mutually acceptable solution.
- We will respect each other as individuals, and therefore not engage in personal insults and attacks.

Participants can use the ground rules throughout the conflict resolution process to monitor and modify their behaviors. Ground rules give participants an objective, logical way of addressing personal attacks and emotional issues.

An example: “Joe, I feel like you have cut off my last several statements. We agreed at the beginning of this that we would listen to each other’s statements fully before answering.”

If the conflict is being mediated, this also gives the mediator a fair way to give participants feedback and help them work with the conflict. Since the same rules are being applied to everyone, it can help the mediator maintain fairness and avoid bias.



Choosing the Time and Place



The right time and place is often a key part of resolving conflict. Trying to solve a major team issue five minutes before the end of the shift just isn't going to work – people are going to be focused on going home, not on the problem.

When possible, choose a quiet place to discuss the conflict. Make sure that there is lots of time allowed. Minimize distractions if possible: turn cell phones off, forward office phones to voice mail, and turn off computers.

If you are mediating a conflict resolution meeting, be conscious of the needs of both parties when scheduling the meeting. Make sure that the time chosen works well for both of them. Choose a location that is neutral (one that they are both comfortable with or that neither has visited before). Removing distractions will enable both parties to concentrate on the matter at hand: resolving the conflict.

Further Study

To learn more about conflict resolution look for additional mini-toolkits and consider our in-person offerings such as, [Conflict Management](#), [Conflict Resolution skills for Healthcare Professionals](#) and [Difficult People and Difficult Behavior: Tips, Tactics, and Tools](#). Further trainings to develop Individual Excellence will be shared here in the Leadership Café, on all of the competencies found in our [Competency Guide](#). Subscribe now to [The Learning Lab](#), an online platform featuring Business Skills & Productivity, Leadership Development, and Office 365, powered by Skillsoft Percipio and customized for UW learners.