

Resolving Coworker Conflicts

Courtesy of Barnabas Health – One Source Employee Assistance Program

Coworker conflicts can be one of the most difficult forms of workplace stress. Understanding the nature of conflict, examining myths, and learning simple, conflict resolution skills can reduce conflicts and their negative toll on your job satisfaction and productivity.

The Nature of Conflict

Workplace conflicts naturally emerge from the incompatible or opposing needs, wishes, external demands, or perceived demands of others.

Often stressful, conflict at work is normal. When managed and controlled, conflict in the workplace can stimulate change and discovery, and increase productivity. Understanding accepted principles about conflict in the workplace can help you feel less victimized by it and more in control of its outcome.

Myths About Workplace Conflict

- **Myth #1: Conflict is a Bad.** In the workplace, conflict is not inherently bad. It is a symptom, not a problem - a signal to do something to manage differences. What follows is a new outcome toward the goal of seeking harmony in the workplace and improving productivity.
- **Myth #2: Conflict is Win-Lose.** Conflict is often mistakenly viewed as a contest of wills and determination where one person wins and the other loses. This view reduces the potential benefits of conflict and can make it worse.
- **Myth #3: Only Bad Employees Cause Conflict.** Difficult employees may contribute to conflict, but most workplace conflicts are between productive and dedicated employees. Inadequate approaches to conflict resolution, contribute to the belief that conflict must be a disciplinary matter.

Early Intervention Is Key

Because conflicts have the potential of becoming crises, early intervention is important. Once a crisis exists, attitudes of those in conflict become rigid. Consider these keys to conflict resolution:

- **Expect Conflicts:** Decide that conflict will occasionally emerge in the discourse of human relationships. Don't fear conflict, learn to spot its symptoms early and see opportunity in the resolution of conflict.
- **Practice Preventative Maintenance:** Talk about your relationship with your coworker. Avoid withdrawal, avoidance, or the view that your coworker is a "bad person." These are defensive mechanisms that prevent the resolution of conflict.
- **Frequently Discuss Four Conflict Parameters:** Existing Concerns: 1) communication between ourselves, our team, or the supervisor; 2) our roles and duties; 3) needs and resources for doing our job; 4) the work environment-customer stress, politics in the organization, or expectations of our work unit." What contributes to conflicts in these areas? Seek solutions to identify problems, and follow up.
- **Get Leverage on Yourself:** When conflict between you and a coworker appears without resolution, it is time to get leverage. Be accountable for resolving the conflict. This brings your performance evaluation into the equation, but without taking away your responsibility for resolving conflict. This is hard to do, but remarkable changes can happen .

What the EAP Can Do?

There is much to gain in resolving conflicts – your happiness. Call your EAP to schedule an appointment 1-800-300-0628 or speak to your supervisor about scheduling a wellness seminar on Conflict Resolution.