

How to Address Conflict in the Workplace

Research estimates that managers spend 30% of their time dealing with conflict. This conflict can lead to lost productivity, stress and damage to workplace relationships. One of the top reasons cited for leaving a job is unresolved conflict. Organizations can play a role in reducing conflict by creating a culture with open communication, clear roles and level of authority, and incentive pay designed to encourage collaboration instead of competition. Managers can reduce conflict by learning skills to anticipate, prevent and manage conflict.

Think back to your last disagreement you had and replay the interaction in your mind. If you are like most people, you can quickly name how the other person responded, but find it harder to objectively view your behavior. Self-awareness is needed to understand conflict styles and be able to make a conscious choice to respond differently.

Behavioral scientist Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified 5 styles that people use to respond to conflict. They looked at the styles based on value placed on own goals or the value placed on relationship. Assertiveness is the extent a person will try to satisfy his or her own needs or interest. Cooperativeness is the extent to which a person will attempt to satisfy the other person's need or interest. Leaders balance assertiveness and cooperativeness to build trust and produce more creative and successful resolutions to conflict.

Kilmann believes people have a predominant conflict style, but "a person can easily change conflict-handling behavior" by learning how and when to use the different styles. In business and in personal life, learning to read the situation and being able to choose response will lead to a better outcome. The 5 Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes are:

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Competing – The goal is to win by putting your own goals before those of another person. This style is assertive and uncooperative which is the opposite of accommodating. A competitive style can be appropriate when there is a crisis and time is important, when the right decision is clear, when you have to make an unpopular decision, or when it is important for others to understand your position. Be aware that relationships can be damaged more easily with this style and you need to take care not to come off as confrontational, intimidating or aggressive.

Accommodating – The goal is to yield by setting aside your own needs in order to keep the peace. The style is unassertive and cooperative which is the opposite of competing. An accommodating style can be appropriate when learning is important, when the decision is not critical, when unproductive competition needs to be stopped, when harmony is important, when you are wrong or when relationship needs to be preserved. Take care to come across as a martyr or someone who goes along with decision but complains about it.

Avoiding – The goal is to delay or withdraw from conflict. The style is unassertive and uncooperative which is the opposite of collaborating. An avoiding style can be appropriate when you need time to think about decision, when you need to wait for others to make the decision more effectively, when the cost outweigh the benefits of resolving conflict, when more information is needed to make decision or when there is too much emotion is involved. Take care to not come across as uninterested or disengaged and to not let the conflict continue indefinitely and create negativity.

Collaborating – The goal is find a win-win solution. The style is both assertive and cooperative and is the opposite of avoiding. A collaborating style can be appropriate when you need to gain consensus, assumptions need to be tested, or when the decision needs to be integrated across multiple areas. Take care not to use this style all the time and make sure when you use it to make sure the root conflict is addressed.

Compromising – The goal is to find a middle ground by being moderate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. A compromising style is appropriate when a quick resolution is needed, when the relationship needs to be maintained, when all involved have equal power, or when the solution is temporary. Take care not to take the easy way out or make negotiating the compromise into a game.

A full range of emotions are used when dealing with conflict. Mayo Clinic says that, “anger is a normal and even healthy emotion – but it’s important to deal with it in a positive way.” Mayo offers 10 anger management tips which also apply to stress.

10 Anger Management and Stress Tips

- 1. Think before you speak** – Take a moment to ask yourself if what you are about to say is **T**True, **H**elpful, **I**nspiring, **N**ecessary and **K**ind?
- 2. Once you're calm, express your anger** - Express your frustration in an assertive but nonconfrontational way.
- 3. Get some exercise** – Reduce stress that can cause anger with regular physical activity.
- 4. Take a timeout** - Give yourself short breaks during times of the day that tend to be stressful.
- 5. Identify possible solutions** -Work on resolving the issue at hand instead of focusing on what made you mad.
- 6. Stick with 'I' statements** - Use "I" statements to describe the problem to avoid criticizing or placing blame which might only increase tension.
- 7. Don't hold a grudge** – Let go of resentment and use the powerful tool of forgiveness.
- 8. Use humor to release tension** – Laugh more often and use humor to diffuse tension.
- 9. Practice relaxation skills** - Practice whatever it takes you to relax: deep-breathing exercises, repeating a

calming word or phrase, listening to music, writing in a journal or doing a few yoga poses.

10. Know when to seek help - Seek help for anger issues if your anger seems out of control, causes you to do things you regret or hurts those around you.

I teach a Conflict Management workshop and can help your organization gain the skills and knowledge to resolve conflict with better outcomes. Since 2001, Harmony Coaching & Consulting has partnered with organizations, industries and individuals to maximize human talent for improved efficiency, profitability and personal growth. When you partner with Harmony you can expect strong, long-term relationships, full comprehension of your business, mission and culture and individual attention to detail. We help you create true harmony within your organization by maximizing the human talent present in your company.

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Schedule of Public Courses

The following courses are being offered to the public by Harmony Coaching & Consulting. Click on the associated link for more information on the program or to register.

Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
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TBD Fall 2018

