

**Conflict is:**

- unavoidable
- a natural part of life and growth
- exists in all human relationships
- comes in many forms

Without conflict, there would be no change and no challenge. By developing self-awareness and communications skills, we can work on the challenge and growth in conflict. This is more productive than allowing conflict to fester and blow up by ignoring it.

**Conflict can be defined as:**

- A relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have, or think they have, incompatible goals
- An ongoing condition where one party perceives that the other party is blocking their goals
- A struggle over values and beliefs

**What is conflict resolution?**

- A way to deal with confrontations before they escalate into violence
- It involves getting to the underlying causes and issues, and trying to find a solution that satisfies both parties

**Conflict vs. Dispute**

Conflict is an ongoing condition in which two or more parties with different goals and interests perceive that the other is blocking them from achieving that goal. Two people can be in conflict for a long time before a dispute ever arises.

The dispute is the event where the conflict "blows up": becoming visible and public. It is a common, though natural mistake to focus on the dispute rather than on the conflict.

**Workplace example:**

If a coworker yells at another coworker, a good question to ask is, "what was the nature of the conflict between them that led to the aggression?" As with disease, if you treat the symptoms rather than the underlying causes, you won't solve the problem and could make the situation worse.

Is conflict always negative? → No. It's the way we choose to deal with conflict that makes it a positive or negative experience.

## Sources of conflict in the workplace

- workload
- the way the work is structured
- lack of information
- different personalities
- poor communication skills
- different expectations
- stereotypes

## Responses to conflict

The way people respond to conflict depends on several circumstances. With different people in different situations responses vary. The key is having skills in all areas and the ability to choose how you want to respond in a particular situation.

### Avoid

- Hoping the problem will go away
- Doesn't address the conflict
- No attention to one's own needs or those of the other
- Might be letting an issue go, being diplomatic, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation
- Effective when time, place or personal health makes it inadvisable to pursue a discussion Accommodate
- Meeting the concerns and needs of the other person
- Doesn't address your own needs
- Giving in or yielding the other person's views
- Effective when you want to work cooperatively with the other person without trying to assert your own concern

### Compromise

- Looking for a mutually acceptable solution which somewhat satisfies both parties
- You give up something and they give up something in order to come up with a solution you both can agree to
- Helps both parties save face
- Effective when you and the other person both want something and you both know you can't have everything you want

### Control

- Strong style where someone where someone uses their power or control of resources to assert his or her own needs
- Trying to win, get your own way
- Effective if there is no concern for the other person's needs and interests

**Problem Solve**

- Working toward solutions that satisfy the needs and concerns of both parties
- Time to look at all the issues and interests you both have and generate options for resolution
- Combines the search for new alternatives and creating solutions that satisfy both parties

There is no right response to conflict. It is important to recognize that all of these approaches are appropriate at different times.

**Active Communication**

**Paraphrasing** involves using your own words to restate what a person has said, and then confirming that you have understood them correctly.

For example, if someone says "Bob is out to get me. He wants this assignment done by Friday", you could respond:

"Let me see if I understood what you just said. You feel that by giving you that assignment, and pressuring you to finish it by Friday, Bob was deliberately setting you up to fail. Is that right?"

**Paraphrasing is important to dispute resolution because:**

- It helps to confirm understanding.
- It gives the original speaker an opportunity to clarify or elaborate.
- It reinforces the message to the other participant(s).
- It is a sign of respect and acknowledgement (that their opinion is important and someone is listening to them).
- Paraphrasing is not to be confused with parroting (repeating the same words back).

Summarizing pulls together the comments of one or more of the players in a shorter form. It can be a synopsis of events, perspectives, issues, interests, opinions and solutions.

For example, "It seems what both of you are saying is that Judy's injury prevents her from performing all of the duties of her position. You both seem to be saying that Judy is making a sincere effort to overcome her injury, and is willing to take on other duties until she is fully rehabilitated. Is that right?"

**Summarizing can help to:**

- Clarify and confirm understanding
- Remove the negative content from an assertion
- Begin focusing the discussions that are beginning to drift
- Capture information in writing (for flipcharts, notes etc.)
- Identify common ground between the people in dispute

Empathy empathetic listening is a style in which the receiver puts aside his or her self-interests and works to genuinely understand how the other person feels. Empathy is not sympathy, which is a feeling for or about another. And it's not apathy, which is a lack of feeling.

The caring, empathetic listener is able to go into the world of another to see as the other sees, hear as the other hears, and feels as the other feels. Empathy helps gain an understanding of the other person's situation, attitudes and responses.

**Example:**

If you hear:

"I am swamped with work and have no social time." An empathetic response might be:

"I am concerned that you are working so much that you do not have time for a social life."

**Active Listening – The Art of Asking Questions**

**Open questions** are important for inviting and acknowledging information. Open questions begin with "what", "how", "why", "when", etc. and cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no".

Open questions can take many forms:

Clarifying questions -- seek more information; clear up an ambiguity

- What is meant by this new workplace process?
- Why do you prefer that particular solution?

**Probing questions** - invite further comment and encourage the person to elaborate on a part of a statement that they have left unsaid

- What did you mean when you said that this kind of behaviour was typical of your local representatives?
- How did you know that the union meeting was uninviting?
- What happened to give you that perception?

**Justifying questions** - help to clear up contradictions or inconsistencies

- I thought I heard you say earlier that you had more seniority than Mary. Now you are saying that she has been with the department longer than you. Would you explain that for me?

**Consequential questions** - ask about potential outcome

- What do you think will happen to our chapter if you are unable to work out your difference with Ken?