



Perspective

You Are Not My Problem: Successful Conflict Resolution

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The Problem

Why are we so different and yet similar to others all at the same time? Such questions often come to mind as we find ourselves in conflict with others over facts, goals, interests, values, actions, beliefs, assets, methods, or values. Recognizing these differences, and establishing boundaries, helps us to refocus and realize that to solve any problem, we first need understanding.

We human beings are the most intelligent species on earth. We're unique and wonderfully made. Look around and you will see diversity in age, race, color, gender, education, skills, communication style, nationality, ability and disability, income, religion, and personality. Because we are multi-dimensional, it is not likely we'll be successful in life without having a few conflicts with others.

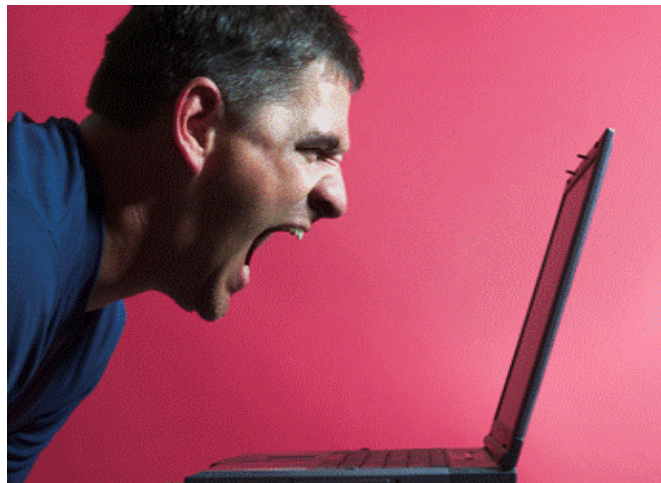


We experience conflicts in business, with employees, clients, colleagues, and in personal relationships. According to Wikipedia, **Conflict Resolution** or conflictology is the process of attempting to resolve a dispute or a conflict. *Successful* conflict resolution requires listening to, and providing opportunities to meet each side's needs, then adequately addressing their interests so that each is satisfied with the outcome.

Conflicts can arise from any number of sources including:

- Interpersonal, emotional, group dynamics, or economic challenges.
- Goal differences.
- Values and ethics.
- Communication barriers.
- Cultural differences.
- Personalities.
- Parties being unwilling to negotiate.
- Individuals being mean spirited and/or unkind.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding about a matter.
- Disparity in skills and abilities.
- Power imbalances.
- Perceived or legitimate concerns that a party may not be adequately skilled to address.

Conflict is a fact of life in business, and resolving conflict successfully is essential to keeping everyone focused on the company's true priorities.



Conflict resolution aims to end conflicts before they start or lead to verbal, physical, or legal fighting. This is different from conflict management, where conflict is used as a deliberate personal, social, or organizational tool. Though conflict management is the more common road, it is not popular with practitioners of conflict resolution who feel it is better to avoid the conflict at the start. As Napoleon Hill said: "The most important job is that of learning how to negotiate with others without friction."

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Reaching a Solution

The Duke (Mr. Ellington) had it right when he said, "A problem is a chance for you to do your best." To deal with a conflict successfully, be concerned about your own outcomes and also the outcomes for the other party(ies). You may consider using a process like the one below to assist in your situation. This process can be useful to effectively deal with conflict in relationships, workplaces, or in other situations where there is an interest in seeking a negotiated solution. These steps won't guarantee an agreement, but they greatly improve the likelihood that the problems can be understood, solutions explored, and consideration of the advantages of a negotiated agreement can occur within a relatively constructive environment. They provide useful strategies that reduce the impacts of stress, fears, and "surprise" factors involved in dealing with conflict.

Success strategies for conflict resolution include:

1. Have a high concern for both your own and the other party's outcomes, and attempt to identify mutually beneficial solutions.
2. Know thyself and take care of thyself.
 - Recognize that your personal perceptions and biases can influence how you view and handle situations.
 - Create a personally affirming environment for yourself before addressing the conflict (have adequate rest and meals, seek counsel, etc.)
3. Clarify personal needs threatened by the conflict.
 - Know your substantive, procedural, and psychological needs.
 - Determine your "desired outcomes" from a negotiated process.
4. Identify a safe place to meet and negotiate.
 - Arrange an appropriate space for the discussion that is private and neutral.
 - Seek to gain mutual consent to negotiate and ensure the time is convenient for all parties.
 - Consider if support people would be beneficial (e.g., facilitators, mediators, advocates, etc.).
 - Agree to ground rules.
5. Take a listening stance into the interaction.
 - "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." (Covey)
 - Use active listening skills and listen loudly.

6. Assert your needs clearly and specifically.
 - Use “I-messages” as tools for clarification.
 - Build from what you have heard – continue to listen loudly and actively.
7. Approach the interaction with flexibility.
 - Identify issues clearly and concisely.
 - Participate in generating options (e.g., brainstorm), while deferring judgment.
 - Be open and don’t get distracted by “tangents” and other problem definitions.
 - Clarify criteria for decision making.
8. Manage impasses with calm, patience, and respectful behavior.
 - Clarify feelings.
 - Focus on underlying needs, interests, and concerns.
 - Take a structured break if needed.
9. Build an agreement that works.
 - Review “hallmarks” of a good agreement.
 - Implement and evaluate – live and learn.

Using these techniques can improve the outcome of a conflict resolution process for everyone concerned. Having a skilled and experienced facilitator or consultant at your side can also help you manage the process, especially if you do not have a lot of experience yourself. This is where HR Anew can help; our human resource consultants have the expertise to support you through to a successful conclusion with creative problem-solving strategies and a depth of knowledge that will help you reach a win-win conclusion.

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For a complimentary coaching session, call or email: Melanie Freeman, Manager, Educational Solutions, at 410-381-5220 or mfreeman@hranew.com.