



NEWSLETTER
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Resolving a Conflict

Almost everyone has experienced a serious conflict between two individuals at work – usually with each person assuming that the other is unreasonable. The protagonists share their grief with other parties, trying to make a positive case for their own situation and, perhaps, stating the unreasonableness of the other party. The higher the level of the individuals in conflict, the more people that the stressful situation affects. Besides the tension on the warring individuals, the situation is highly awkward for everyone else. What to do?

You cannot let a conflict go on, for its disruptiveness will be costly for the company. Take steps now.

If you are familiar with the CCCC approaches, you can engage in any of the conflict resolution tools available: resolve within the ‘cone’ of the Safe Environment; apply methods to defuse emotions; or use the accumulating techniques of CCCC. This of course assumes, that both parties are willing to apply the CCCC techniques.

Since most people in the world do not know of CCCC, and furthermore have no idea what CCCC principles to apply, this paper can be most helpful if it addresses the needs of this broader public.

Two situations present themselves:

- a) you are outside of the conflictive pair (and want to see the issue or situation brought back to normal), or
- b) you are a member of the conflictive pair.

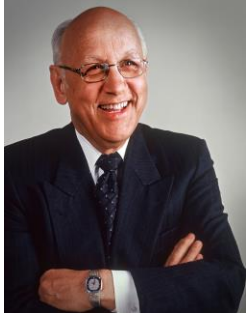
It is easier to work on someone else’s problem so we will begin with your being outside of the conflictive pair.

Outside of the Conflict

If you are at the same level as the conflictive pair, you can attempt to talk to each, but you risk their not listening to you, and even worse, each of them making you their enemy too. Advice: stay out of the conflict but go to the superiors of the individuals and request that they address the situation.

If you are the superior of one or both of the individuals, proceed as follows with the two of them:

1. Call a meeting with the three of you to discuss the issue, saying that the resulting tension is not good for the work environment and the other employees in the company, so, as leader, you want to do what you can to attempt to smooth out the situation.
Say that a rule of this discussion is that no one will interrupt the person who is speaking. Each will be given a chance to say what is on their minds and to be heard fully (if one does interrupt, you step in right away, and the other will usually back off).
2. A second rule is that there will be no accusations (i.e. no blaming). Instead the offended person would explain the effect on him or her. That is, instead of saying that “*the shipping department stinks*”, say “*I do not receive my supplies from shipping when I expect them.*”
3. A third rule, is avoid offering solutions; at this time this will be merely a list of related points. Using a flip chart, ask person A to list three points regarding the issue, and you write them down. Then ask person B to list three points regarding the issue, and write them down. Be ready to write down conflicting statements. For example if person A says the sheet is white, write it down. If person B says the sheet is black, write it down. Keep going back and forth, patiently, until they run out of things to say (and write down).



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4. Next, find points on which the two people can agree and deal with all of those first. Not only does it get the issues out of the way, it has the two parties realize that they do agree on a lot of points.
5. Take the first point where there is no agreement. With it, repeat the above procedure, listing A and B's responses to the issue, cancelling the common points first and tackling the differences.
6. Weigh in yourself (as the boss) on the conflictive issue as to how you believe it should play out.
7. If the process does not work, take a break and come back to it on another day. *IT WILL WORK THEN.*

Inside the Conflict

If you are one of the two protagonists, proceed as follows:

- Take steps to get your own emotions under control. Stop dwelling on 'how bad the other person is' although that direction is so tempting and often appears justified in your own mind.
- Attempt to look at your own contribution to the situation. Remember the only person in the world that you can control is yourself; you cannot control anyone else. Therefore a self-focus is essential. What did you do wrong: Raise your voice? Swear at the other person? Attempt to get sympathy from other members of your team? Stalk angrily out of the room? Go over and over in your mind how the situation 'should' have been handled? Let your short fuse explode too quickly? Accuse the other person in your mind as being unreasonable? Let's for the moment, agree that the other person is more 'wrong' than you, so that is no longer a factor. Now, focus on your own 'wrongs'. If you were on public television, would you behave the way you have just been behaving with this other party? Perhaps you might list these 'self-wrongs' on a sheet a paper; writing will certainly reinforce that you may have some culpability. Remember that it is no longer about the 'unreasonableness' of the other person, rather it is about what you, yourself, might, and can, do to improve the situation.
- Put out an olive branch to the other party. This takes enormous strength and courage. Besides, it may get rejected, further fueling your own hard feelings. Assuming the other party accepts the olive branch, proceed as noted above (*Outside of the Conflict*) to discuss the issue, bringing in a third party, if you can.
- Bring in a neutral third party to help with further issues with your antagonist. *For example*, if your discussion about widgets is the cause of the concern of the other party, request a third party to take over the widget discussion and put yourself on the sidelines.
- Do not behave in a hostile manner with the other party. No passive aggression – otherwise you are furthering the conflict. Treat things with the other party like business as usual.
- Two unequal situations can arise, each requiring a different approach:
 - You are in conflict with a person lower on the totem pole than you
 - You are in conflict with someone higher on the totem pole than you.

YOU ARE HIGHER: As stated above, draw in someone else, a third party, so to speak, to deal with the issue with the other protagonist. Hope that it all works out. If the third party is unsuccessful on helping resolve the issue, then you need to make a personnel change in your department, requesting the other party to move on, as noted below.

YOU ARE LOWER: Give in or move on. Realize that if work is no fun anymore because of repeating conflicts, then move on – the sooner the better. Forget about judging who is right and who is wrong. What you do know is that the situation does not suit you and your situation well. Therefore make plans to move onto another less conflictive environment. Bury the hatchet and move on.

As this paper is being written, I am engaged in three different enterprises (in three different cities) where each has a serious conflict that has been going on for too long. I expect that all will be concluded successfully shortly using these methods.

Good luck to you,
Bill
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