Conflict Resolution Tips

Conflict can arise in even the best of situations. Part of adapting to the professional world is learning how to tactfully and productively handle such challenges. Beyond its importance for your coworker relationships, effectively diffusing and resolving conflict is at the heart of managing your own well-being, personal energy and immediate happiness. Here's some friendly advice on how to approach conflict.

- **Explore and understand all sides before judging.** The most difficult time to hone your active listening skills is when you're emotionally engaged and eager to make your own point. It's common for people to think they're listening, while in their heads they're actually formulating their next response, thinking to themselves how wrong the other person is, or doing things other than trying to understand the other person's perspective as well as get defensive and entrenched to the point of not truly hearing.

- **Keep your poise.** It's important to stay in the moment.**.** Assess the issue at hand. Avoid taking things to a personal level if possible. Be slow to anger; remain assertive, not aggressive**,** especially over petty issues.

- **Acknowledge salient points.** After the other person expresses a thought or idea, summarize the facts and emotions you heard to ensure you've interpreted what they have shared correctly. It may help to ask questions to clarify what you may not understand, which can also buy yourself some time to keep your composure.

- **Remain tactful and positive.** Don't interrupt, criticize, laugh, offer advice, or change subjects. Share your concerns -- use "I" statements about how you feel and perceive the situation, as well as sharing your own needs. Avoid telling people they're wrong; rely on evidence

- **Seek common ground as soon as possible.** Is there a fair "win-win" you both can live with? Sometimes a simple and obvious answer comes up once both parties understand the other person's perspective. In cases where the conflict was based on a misunderstanding or a lack of insight to the other's point of view, a simple apology can work wonders.

- **Compromise is a good thing.** In cases where there's a conflict about an issue and both people don't agree, you have a few options: you can agree to disagree; find a compromise or middle ground; the person who is less dispassionate may yield, perhaps with an understanding the other will concede the next time. If you're wrong, admit it; but don't go out of your way.

- **Fallback.** If things become contentious or warrant reflection, the best option may be to take a break, seek some distance to let "cooler heads prevail" and commit to finding resolution later. This may also allow you to collect and organize your thoughts by writing them down so you can be more objective and focused upon re-engaging one another.

- **Assess the final outcome.** The important thing is to come to a place of understanding, and try to work things out in a way that's respectful to all involved. Remember, your co-workers do not have to be your best friends. Respect their professional abilities and approach each person in a professional manner. The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing: As long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth. In many cases, effective conflict resolution skills can make the difference between positive and negative outcomes. The good news is that by resolving conflict successfully, you can solve many of the problems that it has brought to the surface as well as getting benefits that you might not expect at first.

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