

## SKILL BOOSTER 12: 10 TIPS FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



**REIGNITE DEVELOPMENT**  
Reflect, Refocus, Results

### Ten Tips for Conflict Management

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It's not always an issue challenge for people to deal with, but many of us know that left unchallenged or not dealt with can create issues for individuals, teams and organisations.

Consider these 10 steps for managing it if you see it or are made aware of it:

#### 1. Make it easy to raise issues.

Make it easy for people to find a route to voicing their views. You could make one person (formally or informally) a first point of call when people feel uncomfortable about something. Make it easy for them to approach the matter, while it is still a matter of concern. If you're a manager – how approachable are you? Are you creating the space for conflict to be raised.

#### 2. Ask yourself whether this particular conflict is 'bad'.

Conflict can be a good thing. It can help challenge teams and individuals but often there needs to be the right amount of trust and respect within teams to build healthy challenge and debate. 'Good' conflict can get people thinking, and energise them into finding a solution or a different course of action. It can prevent simmering undercurrents by bringing feelings into the open, where they can be addressed. It can bring sudden realisations about how things could change. Handled well, it's an energiser and a stimulant, so be careful not to 'label' *all* conflict as 'bad'.

#### 3. Label your emotions.

If not handled well, conflict can rapidly turn into emotional attacks. This often means that anger is directed against a person, not the problem. That person then retaliates, and it soon gets out of hand. People can avoid this by thinking first about the emotion you're feeling, instead of about the person you see as responsible. Deal with the anger, disappointment, fear, etc, before you start thinking about the people involved and try and separate the two!

#### 4. Look for signs that conflict is damaging.

If people are making unpleasant remarks about each other or you feel the conflict is potentially damaging relationships or outputs, as a line manager, you need to intervene. If you don't feel able as the line manager to resolve it, you could consider speaking to your HR/L&D team (if you have one) and asking for some mediation support.

## **5. Know your team or people in conflict.**

This might not always be possible but it's usually a good idea to respond to conflict in a way that resonates best with the specific individual. Some people react well to a quiet word, others might need a more direct approach, some may be more sensitive to perceived criticism therefore understand your team or the people in conflict and try and deal with individuals appropriately.

## **6. Ensure all parties have an opportunity to speak.**

A really effective model, is one shared by Nancy Kline in her book "Time to Think" where you give each person an allocated amount of time to share their feelings and frustrations with no interruptions, this way everyone's voice is heard and they all have an opportunity to share. This can be an effective process where you might have some individual team members who dominate others.

## **7. Be specific.**

If you are giving feedback or telling someone about their impact, be specific and ensure you give the feedback as close to the event as possible so that it's fresh in your mind and theirs.

## **8. Think about the environment.**

You may prefer to keep it formal, but make the environment as conducive as possible. Sometimes a 'neutral' location can be helpful. Above all, reduce or avoid anything that might distract either party.

## **9. Get decisions/actions into effect quickly.**

Once a solution or way forward has been agreed, ensure all parties understand and agree to commitment and get it implemented. If it can't happen immediately, draw up a timetable which is rapid, but feasible, and make sure it happens.

## **10. Provide training/consider team/individual profiling.**

It might be that the conflict is caused by a lack of understanding of different personalities or approaches to work or making decisions. Again, if you have a HR/L&D team who are skilled in profiling tools, you might want to explore running something like this either for the individuals or the whole team. This can be helpful to enable individuals to understand more about themselves and each other.