



The art of managing conflict

Reflection guide

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Overview

- Look at conflict as a natural part of life and relationships
- Have a better understanding of the reasons behind how we usually deal with conflict
- Learn about five different conflict styles that all of us use, from time to time, to “resolve” conflict
- Learn about a different approach to conflict resolution
- Apply this approach to conflict situations we regularly experience in our daily lives

Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

Key messages

You will understand the nature of conflict and its impact, learn about the effects of unresolved conflict, identify and understand the 5 conflict personalities, and learn some practical strategies for resolving conflict.

Five types of conflict styles

Which one are you?

Avoider

- Withdraws
- Avoids conflict
- Avoids people
- Gives up goal
- Gives up relationship
- “Conflict resolution is hopeless”
- Takes a Time Out to calm down
- May not get own goals/needs met
- May lose opportunities to build stronger relationships

Competitor

- Overpowers, overwhelms
- Wants to win at all cost
- Goal: Important
- Relationship: Not important
- “My way or the highway”
- Clear and direct about one’s own needs or goals
- May damage key relationships
- May miss opportunities to create even better solutions by holding fast to their own ideas

Accommodator

- Seeks harmony
- Tries to smooth over conflict
- Goal: Not Important
- Relationship: Very Important
- Fears that conflict will destroy relationship
- Communicates with respect,
- Listens, tries to understand, and be supportive
- May not get own goals/needs met
- May become resentful which can inadvertently damage relationships

Compromiser

- Seeks compromise
- Aims for middle ground
- Goal: Moderately Important
- Relationship: Moderately Important
- Has desire to Negotiate
- May jump in before heat has died down, thereby getting a less-than-positive resolution
- May not discriminate between “negotiable” and “non-negotiable”

Collaborator

- Conflicts = problems to be solved
- Seeks a win-win resolution
- Goal: Very Important
- Relationship: Very Important
- De-personalizes a conflict, which prevents “blame game”
- May not recognize the urgency of a situation
- May push for more “processing” than is realistic in the workplace
- Thinks WIN / WIN

Describe your conflict

Describe a conflict you are currently engaged in, or one that has not yet been resolved.

Who was involved? What happened?

Where do you stand now?

How do you feel about it?

Conflict scenarios

Here's an opportunity to explore using conflict styles strategically. Some of the following scenarios can be resolved using more than one conflict style. Think about how important the relationship factors are in the scenario, and how important the outcome factors are. Then choose a conflict style that will give you the results you want.

Scenario 1

You have worked with Joe, one of your co-workers, for several years and you've discovered that no matter what the issue, you typically end up on opposite sides of the fence. You respect Joe's technical skills, but the relationship between the two of you has never been comfortable. With the exception of your boss, no one at your workplace knows that you've accepted a new position with a different company and will be leaving in three weeks. Today, Joe comes over to you and is very upset at you for a decision you made last month. This decision has already been implemented and cannot be reversed.

What conflict style will you choose to address this issue? Why?

Scenario 2

At work you are really busy. In fact, your whole department is out of control with an overwhelming workload. At 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, your boss asks you to pick up a new assignment. She asks you to get it done by tomorrow, Friday, at noon. You know that you have two other deadlines to meet by tomorrow, and that you are accompanying your boss to a sales meeting tonight.

What conflict style will you choose to address this issue? Why?

Scenario 3

You are planning to go to a movie with a good friend. Your friend has had a very stressful month and is overworked, tired and cranky. The movie you would like to see, which is on its last week of running, requires you to go across town and to kill some time before the show is scheduled to start. Your friend's choice of movie is at a theatre close by and starts soon. However, you have very little interest in seeing the movie your friend is suggesting.

What conflict style will you choose to address this issue? Why?

Scenario 4

You are at a store. You have just found exactly the dining room table of your dreams. You have been looking for a table for over six months, and, better still, this one is on sale for half price. There is only one table of the style you like left. You go looking for a salesperson to get some information about home delivery, and by the time you get back to the table, someone else has decided that this is the table they want too.

What conflict style will you choose to address this issue? Why?

Scenario 5

You have just bought a house beside your in-laws. It is a beautiful home and you love it. Your in-laws are helping you out with childcare several times a week which you really appreciate. However, their dearly beloved dog is ripping your lawn apart and destroying your kids' toys. The dog has also punctured the garden hose by chewing on it.

What conflict style will you choose address this issue? Why?

A different approach

Often, when there is a conflict, the people who disagree will each try to win. When this happens, both people focus on winning and it becomes difficult to find a way to make the changes necessary to resolve the conflict. When people approach conflict as a win/lose proposition, they are likely to be left with feelings of anger and the problem may get worse instead of better. As long as the goal of dealing with conflict is winning, both people will remain stuck in conflict.

If the word “conflict” is stripped of all of its values, what remains is a process which signals a need for change. That process is neither positive nor negative, neither good nor bad; it simply is. Conflict can be expressed clearly and directly in terms of the problem it creates. It is also possible for conflict to be resolved in such a way that all concerned parties are winners. Furthermore, if conflict is expressed peacefully and if all parties work to solve the problem to their mutual advantage, then there is another very positive outcome: learning. When people try earnestly to resolve a conflict, they will learn new things about themselves and about each other, whether or not a resolution is reached immediately.

The notion of conflict as a positive force or process is not a common viewpoint in our society. Many people approach conflict as a win-or-lose, sink-or-swim proposition and they fight to win, sometimes as if their lives depended on it. Often we see people respond in the opposite way, as well. “Rather than acknowledging the existence of a problem, many people will avoid the situation and suppress their anger. These people have been taught since childhood that it is inappropriate to be angry and that engaging in conflict is unacceptable.

When people express their feelings in constructive ways and work together to get what they want, conflicts can be addressed when they first occur and are very small. This approach reduces anxiety and prevents escalation of the dispute by addressing problems when they can be resolved quickly and easily.

Working together to resolve disputes can lead to better, stronger relationships, better feelings about ourselves and others, and better personal health all around.