

HOW TO HANDLE CONFLICT AT WORK

BY TANEKA SHEHEE, OMBUDSPERSON

Adapted from "6 Strategies to Resolve Conflict at Work" by Mike Kappel, Entrepreneur Magazine, November 3, 2017



Do not ignore the emotional aspects of conflict at work. Although Probation Staff are "Professionals," we are also human beings. And when you work with a group of humans day after day, there is bound to be conflict. What is the action plan to resolve conflict at work? This is Part 1 of a two-part article.

1. Embrace conflict.

When conflict arises, don't avoid it or pretend nothing has happened. If you do, as time goes on tension will build and the conflict only will get worse. Tension arises because you feel that work is not distributed fairly. You begin to feel resentment that your efforts are not being recognized, or the "weak staff" are being rewarded by being given an easy assignment because they cannot handle their real job. Thus, we have MYTH 1 - Probation rewards the "weak staff".

2. Talk together.

Set up a time and place so you can talk without outside interruptions. Remember, this is not the time to attack or assign blame. Each person should talk about the disagreements and how he or she feels about the situation. Ask yourself the following questions:

What do I want to happen?

Can the issue be resolved?

If the issue can be resolved, am I talking to the right person who can resolve it?

If the issue cannot be resolved, do I just want to be heard?

3. Listen Carefully

Across the board, researchers, elders, and therapists say it is essential to give a speaker complete attention. Do not interrupt. Most often while the other person is speaking, we are thinking about what we want to say. We do not hear the other person because we are preparing for our defense. Probation staff often think of themselves as lawyers. Remember the mandatory Motivational Interviewing classes Probation had us attend? After listening carefully, you should be able to articulate. "Let me make sure I understand. You're upset about _____ because _____" sentence was the best communication tool I learned in those classes. Do not let yourself become reactionary to the other person's words.



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4. Find agreement.

Resolution is only possible when you find points of agreement. Therefore, your conversation cannot solely focus on the gripe. There must be positive feedback too.

5. Provide guidance/ seek mediation.

If you're in a leadership position there are times you may need to mediate work conflict. Don't take sides, ever. Realize you are there simply to help your employees work out their problems. As mediator you may need to redirect the topic to help your employees stay focused on the real problem. Give advice and develop a plan of action.

It is okay to seek mediation if you feel there will be angst or retaliation from trying to bring an issue to someone.

6. Be quick to forgive or apologize

A simple apology can help jump start a new beginning. While every conflict needs a clear resolution, most often this is not the case and there are hurt feelings. Respect for each other goes a long way towards resolution.



We can "agree to disagree" but that does not help with resolution. Thus, compromise becomes the best solution. But what if you cannot compromise?

We will discuss compromise next time in Part II of Resolving Conflict in the Workplace.

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