

## **Conflict Management for Dummies!**

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### **1) Cool off!**

Conflicts are not easily solved in the face of hot emotions. Gain emotional distance before trying to talk things out. This gives you an opportunity to choose your response rather than unconsciously reacting – which will often amp up conflict. A 5 minute “time-out” is perfectly acceptable and appropriate in almost any situation.

### **2) Know Thyself.**

Take a moment to consider your own perceptual filters, biases and triggers and how your “blind spots” might be contributing to the conflict. Do you have a tendency to personalize things or interpret other’s silence as hostility? Remember that everyone sees life differently and a failure to take this into account is the main ingredient in conflict – local or global. Your lens is only one of a multitude and no one’s is better or worse. Just different.

### **3) Share what’s bothering you but stay on ‘your side of the net!’**

This may be the most important step in conflict management. By owning our feelings and perceptions instead of blaming or judging, the other person is far more likely to be receptive and stay open. Remember, feelings are feelings, interpretations are interpretations and facts are facts. Share feelings and interpretations, but anchor in the facts. “When you went to your supervisor before talking to me about the project, I felt frustrated and not respected and my interpretation was that you wanted to take over the project.” This gives the other person the opportunity to hear your experience without feeling wrong and then provide clarity about what was going on for them, which was quite possibly different than you imagined.

### **4) Mirror back what you’re hearing.**

It is only by our willingness to become a “tourist” in someone else’s experience that we open the door for new possibilities and solutions to emerge. This can be done by listening at a deep level without worrying about right or wrong. Remember that the other person’s position and opinion is as important to them as yours is to you. The goal is to clarify interpretations. Sincerely committing to this step creates a conciliatory tone and resolution comes as we begin to understand where each other is coming from.

## **5) Take responsibility. Share this with the other person.**

In the majority of conflicts, both parties have responsibility. When one person willingly steps up and owns their piece, the conflict can't help but shift gears and become an entirely different animal where the other party is far more likely to follow suit. It's not always easy to be the first one to take the "high road," but it usually has immediate results. E.g. "I realize that I reacted without waiting to hear your explanation. I was feeling anxious about containing the damage and I acted too quickly. I take responsibility for that."

## **6) Brainstorm Solutions. What will satisfy both parties?**

Conflict resolution is inherently a creative process. There is never one single solution. The key is a willingness to find an answer instead of staying stuck in your original position. Try and come up with 5 different ways to solve the problem. Co-create a solution. Try to focus on "you and me against the problem," vs. "you against me."

## **7) Affirm, forgive or thank.**

This provides closure and galvanizes a deeper bond. For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom to again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence. We preserve and strengthen relationships by working through problems that arise.