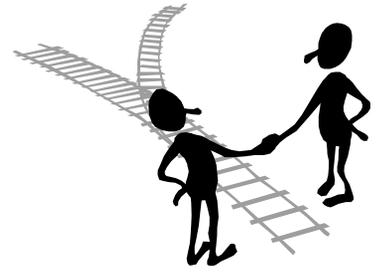


# How To Avoid Harmful Conflict

("The Management Bible")



## Quotable Quote

It is the hostility which is usually seen as the harmful aspect of conflict. The management of conflict thus becomes an effort to eliminate or minimise hostility, acknowledging that it is inevitable, if not healthy, for individuals or groups to strive to attain their own preferred outcomes or to satisfy their own particular interests.

Conflict is inevitable in any organisation. When handled properly, it can contribute significantly to personal and organisational health. It can improve understanding and produce innovative solutions to problems. When handled poorly, however, it leads to hurt feelings, damaged relationships, and low moral. Managers must be able to minimise hostility between themselves and their staff members; and the best way to manage harmful conflict is to prevent it from ever arising. Here are some suggestions.....

## 1 – Learn to be an effective communicator.

Communication is the lifeblood of an organisation. Conflict is often caused by people not listening to or understanding each other. Misunderstandings can result in accusations, blame, and personal attacks. At times, there is no real conflict, simply misinterpretation.

Work at improving your communication skills for listening and speaking so that you minimise misunderstanding. Convey the need for clarity to all your discussions.

A climate of openness and honesty will prevent minor issues from blowing out into major catastrophes.

## 4 – Avoid the use of threats, demands, and put-downs.

When you denigrate, moralise, threaten, or make demands of others, you are creating a conflict situation. Resist becoming involved in the conflict-generating games that people play.

Do not be hasty to judge others openly; never make personal attacks on people behind their backs or in public; never belittle others' achievements; rather, celebrate with them; and keep your pessimism to yourself.

## 2 – Keep your staff informed.

By withholding information from all those it affects, you can create tension amongst staff, often causing some of them to react adversely and, in doing so, generate conflict situations.

## 3 – Be honest and open with your staff.

When people feel threatened, they become defensive. The best way to discourage any fear of intimidation is for you to behave in a nonthreatening manner. Be open and honest with staff at all times. The more you are perceived as honest and forthright, and receptive and open to the feelings and opinions of others, the less inclined employees will be to go on the defensive.

## 5 – Stay cool.

Don't let other people push your 'get angry' button. There are times when a show of anger may serve you well; there are times when it is smarter to keep your cool. Before over-reacting to anything, count to ten and check out the facts: perhaps you misunderstood, perhaps you misheard....Skirmishes can readily develop into battles.

## 6 – Criticise with caution.

You will be required from time to time to point out mistakes or critique the work of your staff. This should be undertaken in a spirit of support: never criticise anyone's work unless you can make practical suggestions for improvement.

## Don't Forget

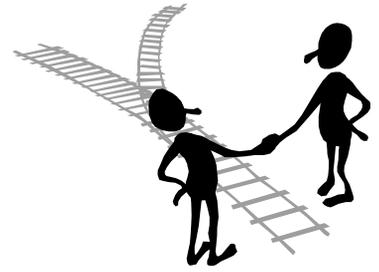
### To minimise conflict.....

- Say something good about another person or event before saying what you don't like.
- Recognise that, though a particular issue may seem critical at the time, in the overall scheme of life, it just may not be that monumental after all.
- Understand that feelings are not bad; only destructive behaviour is bad.
- A calm, reasoned response is always better than a hasty reaction.
- Accept others as they are, even all their shortcomings and annoying habits.



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## Ask Yourself

You *can* keep conflicts in your workplace to a minimum. But, for starters, to keep things running smoothly in your area, do you:

- Listen carefully to employees to prevent misunderstanding?
- Monitor employees' work to help you understand and coordinate their actions?
- Encourage employees to come to you when they can't solve problems with co-workers on their own?
- Clear the air with regular meetings that give employees a chance to discuss grievances?
- Provide a suggestion box, check it frequently, and personally reply to all signed suggestions?
- Offer as much information as possible about decisions (yours and management's) to minimise confusion and resentment?
- Use employee surveys to look for conflicts that haven't yet surfaced?

## 7 – For the sake of argument, don't.

Arguing is a needless waste of energy and time. A battle between two closed minds only results in both parties clinging more tenaciously to their positions. It is far wiser to listen to the other point of view, understand the stance being taken, and attempt to guide the other party towards your point of view through negotiation.

## 8 – Try to be tolerant of others.

Be aware that rarely is anyone 'right', because all of us view situations through our own unique perceptual filters.

Conflict arises when we refuse to respect or tolerate another person's values or opinions. Never condemn someone for failing to live up to your expectations, for such behaviour breeds hostility and frustration that is guaranteed to hurt your colleague and you as well.

## 9 – Never play favourites.

The teacher's pet is often the cause of much resentment in the classroom. So too in the management situation. Avoid the friction caused among staff when you intentionally or unintentionally show preference for one staff member over another.

## 10 – Confront an emerging conflict head-on.

Finally, if a conflict situation between you and a member of staff seems inevitable, tackle it immediately by discussing it with those involved. Never leave the scene, sulk, or withdraw support or cooperation when the going gets tough – such behaviour will not defuse the core issue. Ignoring conflict situations will only ensure greater problems later on.

Carl Rogers suggested that, to clear up misunderstanding promptly, each party should restate the other's position to the other's satisfaction, thereby forcing each to briefly adopt the other's frame of reference. The situation then becomes less emotional, with both parties doing more thinking and listening. The more rational people become, the greater the opportunity for conflict resolution.



## Viewpoint

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.”

- Harper Lee in  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*

