



Tips To Resolving Workplace Conflicts

By Susan Young

“As a result of our responsibilities and interactions with others, there are bound to be disagreements, misunderstandings and differences of opinion. Often, communication is at the heart of these situations.”

The Center for Work Life Policy says that the average professional work week has expanded steadily over the last 10 years. Most professionals in leadership roles work more than just forty hours a week. And that doesn't include after-hour instant messaging, checking e-mails, cell phone calls and “Twittering” at 11:00 p.m. As a result of our responsibilities and interactions with others, there are bound to be disagreements, misunderstandings and differences of opinion. Often, communication is at the heart of these situations. In our competitive world, strong leaders must have outstanding communication and interpersonal skills. With effective communication and a combination of skilled tact, manners, etiquette and mature behavior, we can bridge communication gaps in the workplace.

Webster's Dictionary defines conflict as a sharp disagreement or opposition of interests or ideas. The result can be lower office morale, a drop in productivity and a jump in absenteeism.

One of the greatest challenges of both employees and managers is handling and resolving these differences. Emotional Intelligence (EQ), or what I call “street smarts,” is a big factor. Individuals with high EQ levels share characteristics and traits such as compassion, empathy, assertiveness, patience, self-management, and self-awareness. The good news is that these traits can be acquired; the behaviors can be learned. If you weren't born with a high level of EQ, start watching peo-

ple who have these characteristics and observe how they interact with others, how they handle difficult people and resolve tense situations. EQ is more important than your IQ because your IQ can not be changed. You may be book smart, brilliant and well-educated, but if you can't effectively communicate and get along with people, it will have a direct (and negative) impact your success. A recent study by *US News & World Report* found that 90 percent of people are fired from their jobs because of attitudinal or relationship problems. Only 10 percent are fired because of lack of skill or ability. The bottom line is communication.

Understanding the source of conflicts is important when you settling differences. The main reasons for workplace disagreements include poor communication (different styles in communication are usually at the root of this problem), different values and interests (are you more concerned about “you” and not the institution?), tight resources, and personality clashes. Poor performance is another source for conflict.

Aside from avoiding the issue, there are options that can solve or at least diffuse the disagreement.

Here are three communication tips that help you to amicably resolve a dispute:

Hold a face-to-face meeting.

Do not try to address your problem in an e-mail, memo or on a phone call. An in-person meeting is important.

Express your opinion with clarity.

Your ability to articulate your position and opinion while being respectful that not everyone agrees is essential.

Stay focused on the issues.

Bringing up past conflicts and personal attacks are a no-no. That type

of behavior has no place in the business world. Leave it to the 10-year-olds on the playground at the local elementary school.

Speaking of kids, you may need to take a time out. Stepping away from a tense environment or conversation often diffuses the situation and changes the dynamic of the moment. Once you return to address the issue, clearer heads may prevail and an agreement can be reached.

In the programs and trainings I provide to business professionals around the country on Emotional Intelligence and bridging communication gaps, I repeatedly hear scenarios from people (especially those new to leadership) about how they mishandled situations. They express disappointment, frustration and regrets in how they failed to effectively manage a variety of encounters. The common thread all the participants mention is that they were embarrassed about conversations and meetings that consisted of raised voices, criticisms, accusations, misunderstandings and miscommunication.

The next time you are involved in a conflict in the office, try using one of the tips mentioned above. Face the issue head-on and use your communication skills and empathy to resolve the matter without an emotional reaction. Avoiding the conflict is the easy way out. Sticking around to deal with it requires maturity, patience, compromise and communication. That's the mark of a leader.

The New Face of Leadership

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Susan Young works with companies, nonprofits and business professionals who want to develop their sales, leadership and communication skills and make more money. Through her company, Get in Front Communications, Inc., Susan provides trainings, workshops, keynotes and coaching. Susan also owns a public relations firm. Susan has been in the communications and media industry for 25 years. She is an award-winning entrepreneur and radio news broadcaster. Her book, *Communicating with Confidence: Tips & Techniques for Powerful Business Communication* is available at www.getinfrontcommunications.com. Call (210) 375-6422.