



Conflict Resolution Part 2

"I have been a supervisor for many years. Yet, I continue to find dealing with conflicts a distinctly uncomfortable experience. As a result, I typically avoid the people that I am in current disagreement with until it is clear that we are past the conflict. I know that my behavior is not the most mature, proactive response to conflict. What do I need to do to help myself become better at managing conflict?" This is the second in a three-part series addressing conflict in the workplace. Please let us know if you have any questions or feedback ... even if you disagree! Email your responses to the EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com

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Last month, we discussed how conflict occurs naturally in all relationships. Left unresolved, conflict accounts for much of the aggressive interpersonal behavior that creates tension in the workplace. Remember, conflict typically results when one person has a need that another person is not responding to or meeting. Conflicts are often emotionally charged and can escalate if not addressed.

We noted in our last issue that we must listen carefully — with undivided attention — to the other's point of view. That way, we can understand the other's needs.

We also talked about using "I" statements when expressing our own wants and needs. For example: "When you cut me off in discussions, I think you don't respect my input ... and I feel hurt. I need you to let me finish what I am saying."

In this issue, we introduce two new communication skills. These skills, listed below, will help us understand each other better in times of disagreement or conflict.

- **Paraphrasing**
- **Summarizing**

Paraphrasing involves relaying back to the speaker, in your own words, what you heard. When done well, this conveys to the speaker that you are listening deeply and you care about his or her feelings and concerns.

Listening deeply allows you to make sure that your understanding is correct. For example: "Jim, I hear you saying that you are upset with me because I waited a full day instead of immediately notifying you when the shipment arrived. This delayed your response to the customer, and really put you on the spot."

The Successful Supervisor, cont'd

Jim can now either confirm that your understanding of his concerns is accurate or clarify further by restating or giving you additional information. Either way, you are moving closer to "being on the same page," and Jim is likely to feel that you are genuinely interested in his point of view. With complex issues, it may take several attempts to reach clarification.

Summarizing provides a wrap-up of the conversation's main points and highlights them. For example, you listened to a litany of criticisms from Sue on how you handled a customer meeting. You might respond, "Sue, I hear that you are upset about a number of things that happened in the meeting. You mentioned the timing of some of my recommendations, not giving credit to the right people, the people I invited to attend the meeting, and the fact that we closed with no clear resolution. Does this capture your key concerns?" Once Sue confirms, you can both work together to prioritize and discuss each issue.

Dealing with conflict can be anxiety producing, no matter how well prepared you are. Some helpful tips for managing your anxiety include:

- Take several deep, relaxing breaths before the conversation starts and remember to breathe while it is in progress. Notice what is happening in your body (tension, increased heart rate, etc.). Take a second to acknowledge those feelings to yourself. If you are upset, pause, breathe, and calm down before you respond.
- Recognize when judgmental or blaming feelings start to arise and set them aside. Remind yourself what your goal for the conversation is, and focus on that goal.

- Listen more than you talk. People want to be heard.
- Be aware that in almost all situations, the other person is not intentionally trying to be difficult or hurtful toward you. Most people are just trying to get their needs met, and they may lack the communication skills to convey those needs in an effective manner.

When you have become more skilled and confident about resolving the conflicts you find yourself involved in, you will be much better able to step in and assist others who are in conflict. In our next issue, we will review some of the skills needed to provide third party mediation. Until then, contact your HR representative and/or *LifeSolutions* for support in dealing with conflict in the workplace.

Call *LifeSolutions* at 1-800-647-3327 if you would like to learn more about how to improve your conflict management skills. Stay tuned for a new course, "Conflict Resolution and Mediation," that will be offered this year.

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