

Key Ideas Make Difficult Conversations Possible

By Donna Rawady, Executive Coach

Taking the initiative to resolve conflict with a manager, co-worker or colleague is a difficult task for most of us. Fear of repercussion is often one of the reasons for avoidance.

And as we avoid direct communication about our displeasure with another person's behavior or words, resentment tends to build, making it more difficult to make the first move. Here are **a few key guidelines that you may want to consider if you're thinking about making that important first move to resolve a conflict at work.**

Check your motive. Before approaching the person, check your motive. Be sure it includes your desire to generate a positive business impact. For example, if your true motive is to increase productivity, build a better relationship with a colleague or your team, or increase your organization's ability to provide quality customer service, the odds for a positive outcome are good.

"Check your intentions," says workplace and family mediator BJ Mann. "If your intentions are to blame, shame or preach, or you find yourself wagging your finger in your pocket, the outcome is not likely to be favorable."

Avoid assumptions — seek to understand. Generally, if you're feeling uncomfortable or frustrated with someone, it's likely that they are experiencing similar feelings about you. And it's more than likely that each of you are making inaccurate assumptions about the other's feelings and behaviors. How do we avoid making inaccurate assumptions that may

negatively affect our work relationships? Have a conversation. Be honest, respectful and genuinely seek to understand the other person.

Be willing to recommend and participate in a collaborative solution. When conflict exists between two people, each person may have strong feelings about what they believe the other person should be doing to remedy the situation. Chances are, though, both parties had some part, even if not intentional, in entering or remaining in the conflict. In order to resolve a difference, both parties need to be willing to contribute to the solution.

Before starting your discussion, be prepared to offer a recommendation for how you might collaborate to resolve the problem and include a role for yourself. This may include something as simple as agreeing to remain open and communicating promptly with one another in the future should new conflicts arise.

Prepare to respond versus react. How can we minimize our own negative or emotional reactions? Prepare to respond. Responding instead of reacting is powerful in that emotions are minimized. Your ability to calmly respond may have the other person thinking more about what you're saying, rather than how you're behaving. Here's an example of a response you might prepare to deliver in a very uncomfortable situation: "I feel myself reacting to what you've just said and I'd like some time to think about it so that we might have a meaningful dialogue about it later."

Offer thanks and clarify the way forward. Finally, thank the other person for her willingness to discuss the issue. Before parting, clarify the actions, approaches or next steps you each agreed to in your discussion. If applicable, you may want to schedule a follow up conversation.

Resolving conflict may never be easy. But if you genuinely want to work it out and you're direct, chances are the other person will be responsive and long-term outcomes will be positive.

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