

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Table of Contents

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT.....	1
Principal Matters.....	2
PMP:148 - The “Why’s” And “How’s” Of Managing Adult Conflict	2
The “why’s” of managing adult conflict	2
The first-steps in managing adult conflicts	4
Let’s Wrap This Up	5
Now It’s Your Turn	5
HRCloud.com	6
7 Tips on How to Manage and Resolve Conflict in the Workplace	6
1. Clarify what is the source of conflict.....	6
2. Find a safe and private place to talk	7
3. Listen actively and let everyone have their say	7
4. Investigate the situation	7
5. Determine ways to meet the common goal	8
6. Agree on the best solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution ...	8
7. Evaluate how things are going and decide preventative strategies for the future	9
About Author: 9	
Forbes.com	10
5 Keys of Dealing with Workplace Conflict	10
Communication:	11
Emotions:	11
Tips 12	
1. Define Acceptable Behavior:	12
2. Hit Conflict Head-on:	12
3. Understanding the WIIFM Factor:.....	12
4. The Importance Factor:.....	13
5. View Conflict as Opportunity:	13

Principal Matters

William D. Parker & Friends

PMP:148 - The “Why’s” And “How’s” Of Managing Adult Conflict

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One of the biggest surprises for school new school leaders may be the conflicts that arise with adults.

Whether you are encountering conflicts with parents, colleagues or community members, these situations can be difficult to manage. Even experienced principals will tell you that managing conflicts is one of their most challenging but important responsibilities.

In this week’s episode, author [Jen Schwanke](#) and I discuss the “why’s” and the “how’s” in managing adult conflicts — many of the ideas she shares in her book, [You’re the Principal, Now What! Strategies and Solutions for New School Leaders.](#)

The “why’s” of managing adult conflict

First of all, let’s talk about the motivations adults have when bringing conflicts to the principal’s office. As you are encountering scenarios, keep these ideas in mind:

- **People really do care about students and issues.**

Just as you care deeply about students, so do other adults.

Assuming best intentions is a better place to start than assuming the worst.

- **People want to be heard and understood.**
Always seek to understand first before being understood. People often need to feel heard before being offered a solution.
- **People need mediators to help keep the focus on what is important.**
You often have the 1,000 foot view of your school because you have the responsibility to keep the big picture in mind. This places you in an important role as a referee and mediator.
- **It's never "done." There is always another coming...**
Dealing with conflict often means embracing that part of your work that is unpleasant. It will continue to be a role you play, so learn the skills and patience to become better — even while understanding you'll never be perfect at conflict resolution.
- **There's no measure of success. Sometimes everyone leaves unhappy.**
Even if you cannot help others reach a solution they like, you can still be a strong listener and advocate for what is right. In the end, the goal is not happiness, it is reasonable and wise guidance.
- **We are "evaluated" by how well we help other people solve problems.**
Like it or not, your ability to manage and resolve conflict helps the entire school community and district in its service. Learning to do this well also helps you make the jobs of your superintendent or supervisors a lot easier.

The first-steps in managing adult conflicts

Principals manage a lot of discipline scenarios, and some adult conversations can turn ugly. Here are some general ideas for managing tough conversations:

- **Know your district's policies and procedures.**

When relying on the guidelines provided by your district, you have a measuring stick that is often objective and will be supported by your upper administration (in the best case scenarios). Either way, it is essential to let your policies be the primary guidance for consistency in decision making and mediation.

- **Keep your cool.**

It may be hard to keep your own emotions in check, but in order to provide objective feedback, it is a must. Your ability to gauge the emotions in a room and provide clear, calm responses will often help guide the outcomes.

- **Meet in person.**

When possible, it is best to meet face-to-face with someone who is upset, angry, or emotional. You will rarely resolve conflicts through texts or emails. People tend to be less defensive or volatile when face-to-face, and scheduling a meeting offers some time to collect your thoughts and calm emotions.

- **Filter out gossip vs. truth.**

Yes, people will often try to find ways around policies and procedures by diverting the topic to gossip, exaggerations, half-truths or lies. Stick to the facts. Show empathy but be

discerning for what is truthful. This also means understanding both sides of an issue before making a decision.

- **Take responsibility/apologize when it is warranted.**

It's okay to say "I'm sorry" to a parent or other adult when you need to validate their emotions.

- **Remember the pressure the other party is feeling.**

It takes time and courage to reach out with concerns, so be aware of the pressures others feel, acknowledge their stress, and try not to take complaints personally.

Let's Wrap This Up

All of these steps happen after you've established with others that you care and are willing to listen. You will never perfectly manage conflicts, but you can help guide others through tricky or difficult situations by staying objective, relying on strong policies, keeping your cool, and trying to see others' perspectives. In the end, we all have room to grow when it comes to mediating tough conversations.

Now It's Your Turn

What is a step you can take to practice active listening when others bring you concerns while also relying on strong policies and procedures to guide your decisions? In next week's post, PMP:149, Jen and I will dive deeper into other practical steps and scenarios for managing and resolving conflicts with adults.

7 Tips on How to Manage and Resolve Conflict in the Workplace

Employee Engagement

HR Management

Apr 27, 2021

<https://www.hrcloud.com/blog/7-tips-on-how-to-manage-and-resolve-conflict-in-the-workplace>

Conflict is not a strange thing for people. Human beings experience it in their day-to-day lives – with their friends, families, and more so their professional lives. In the workplace, conflict causes a massive degree of frustration, pain, discomfort, sadness, as well as anger. It is a normal life aspect. In the world of today, organizations hire employees from diverse geographical locations with dissimilar cultural and intellectual backgrounds, as well as various viewpoints. In a working environment where people have disparate outlooks toward the same problems, disagreements are bound to happen.

Conflicts are inevitable in a person's day-to-day life. And when they happen, the idea is not to try to prevent them but rather to resolve and manage them in an effective manner. When people use the appropriate tools of resolution to address issues, they will be able to keep their differences from rising to major problems.

"Establishing conflict management processes in a company is fundamental as it helps reduce conflict instances among employees," says Casper Hansen, an expert in resume writing from Resumethatworks. Conflict resolution is integral in the corporate world as it helps to distinguish a good business from a bad one. So, as a business owner, what steps should you follow to resolve a conflict? Well, below are some ways through which you can manage and resolve conflict in the workplace.

1. Clarify what is the source of conflict

The first step in resolving conflict is clarifying its source. Defining the cause of the conflict will enable you to understand how the issue came to grow in the first place. Additionally, you will be able to get both parties to consent to what the disagreement is. And to do so, you need to discuss the needs which are not being met on both sides of the issues. Also, you need to warranty mutual understanding. Ensure you obtain as much information as possible on each side's outlook. Continue asking questions until you are confident that all the conflicting parties understand the issue.



2. Find a safe and private place to talk

Many people often wonder and ask, “What is an approach to solving problems peacefully?” To have a constructive conversation, you need to find an environment that is safe for you to talk to. Such a place also enables you to take the necessary risks for honest communication regarding the issues at hand.

So, before trying to resolve any issue, find a safe and private place to talk. Do not choose the office of either party or a location near them. And while at this place, ensure that each party gets enough time to air out their views regarding the matter.



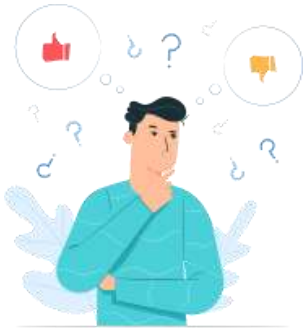
3. Listen actively and let everyone have their say

After getting both parties to meet in a secure and private place, let each of them have the opportunity to air out their views and perceptions regarding the issue at hand. Give each party equal time to express their thoughts and concerns without favoring the other. Embrace a positive and assertive approach while in the meeting. If necessary, set ground rules. Taking this approach will encourage both these parties to articulate their thoughts in an open and honest manner as well as comprehend the causes of the conflict and identify solutions.



4. Investigate the situation

After listening to the concerns of both parties, take time, and investigate the case. Do not prejudice or come up with a final verdict on the basis of what you have. Dig deeper and find out more about the happenings, involved parties, the issues, and how people are feeling. Have an individual and confident conversation with those involved and listen in a keen manner to ensure you comprehend their viewpoints. You can do so by summarizing their statements and replicating them back to them. Also, try finding any underlying conflict sources which may not be evident or noticeable at fast.



5. Determine ways to meet the common goal

When managing conflict processes, you need to have a common objective, which is resolving the issue and ensuring it does not resurface. And to solve any problem, you need to be aware of the different stages of conflict. This will enable you to look for the ideal ways to meet the common goal. After clarifying the source of conflict, talking to both parties, and investigating the situation, you need to sit down with both parties and discuss the common ways you can execute to meet the common goal, which is managing and resolving the matter at hand. Listen, communicate and brainstorm together until you exhaust all options. According to the team lead of Edu Jungles writing company — Kevin Smith, find the source of conflict is the main step to solve any problem.



6. Agree on the best solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution

Managing and resolving conflict leaps model of communication. Employees will find it easy to interact with another as they understand that they have one goal, which is meeting the company's objectives. So, after investigating the situation and determine ways through which you can resolve the issue, both parties need to develop a conclusion on the best solution for the problem. And to agree on the best, you need to identify the solutions which each party can live with. Find common ground. Afterward, determine the responsibilities each party has in resolving the conflict. Also, it is crucial to use this chance to identify the root cause and ensure this issue will not come about again.



7. Evaluate how things are going and decide preventative strategies for the future

Never presume that the issue is resolute. Effective communication ought to dominate in the business. So, ask yourself, “What is the second step of effective communication?” Knowing this will help you ensure that the employees are working together to meet the organizational goals. So, continue keeping an eye on the issue and assess if the solution is effective. If the issue resurfaces, take necessary action.

Also, decide on preventative strategies for the future. Many people often ask, “What is the basic conflict in everyday use?” Some people may not agree on everything, and this may be an issue. So, look for lessons you can learn from the conflict and how you handle it. This will help you know what you can do when the issue resurfaces as well as enable you to develop and nurture your conflict management skills by training. In conclusion, conflict is part of our day-to-day lives. You can disagree with your family, friends, or coworkers. But, there are various conflict resolution steps you can embrace to ensure this issue is not manageable. Managing and resolving conflict at work is integral in meeting organizational goals. So, if you have any problems or there are disagreements between your employers, look for ideal ways you can manage this situation. Above are some tips and techniques you can use to learn how to solve conflicts in the workplace.

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5 Keys of Dealing with Workplace Conflict

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikemyatt/2012/02/22/5-keys-to-dealing-with-workplace-conflict/?sh=159643d41e95>

Here's the thing - leadership and conflict go hand-in-hand. Leadership is a full-contact sport, and if you cannot or will not address conflict in a healthy, productive fashion, you should not be in a leadership role. From my perspective, the issues surrounding conflict resolution can be best summed-up by adhering to the following ethos:

“Don't fear conflict; embrace it - it's your job.”

While you can try and avoid conflict (bad idea), you cannot escape conflict. The fact of the matter is conflict in the workplace is unavoidable. It will find you whether you look for it (good idea – more later) or not. The ability to recognize conflict, understand the nature of conflict, and to be able to bring swift and just resolution to conflict will serve you well as a leader – the inability to do so may well be your downfall.

How many times over the years have you witnessed otherwise savvy professionals self-destruct because they wouldn't engage out of a fear of conflict? Putting one's head in the sand and hoping that conflict will pass you by is not the most effective methodology for problem solving. Conflict rarely resolves itself - in fact, conflict normally escalates if not dealt with proactively and properly. It is not at all uncommon to see what might have been a non-event manifest itself into a monumental problem if not resolved early on.

One of my favorite examples of what I described in the paragraph above is the weak leader who cannot deal with subordinates who use emotional deceit as a weapon of destruction. Every workplace is plagued with manipulative people who use emotion to create conflict in order to cover-up for their lack of substance. These are the drama queens/kings that when confronted about wrongdoing and/or lack of performance are quick to point the finger in another direction. They are adept at using emotional tirades which often include crocodile tears, blameshifting, little lies, half truths and other trite manipulations to get away with total lack of substance. The only thing worse than what I've just described is leadership that doesn't recognize it and/or does nothing about it. Real leaders don't play favorites, don't get

involved in drama, and they certainly don't tolerate manipulative, self-serving behavior.

Developing effective conflict resolution skill sets are an essential component of a building a sustainable business model. Unresolved conflict often results in loss of productivity, the stifling of creativity, and the creation of barriers to cooperation and collaboration. Perhaps most importantly for leaders, good conflict resolution ability equals good employee retention. [Leaders](#) who don't deal with conflict will eventually watch their good talent walk out the door in search of a healthier and safer work environment.

While conflict is a normal part of any social and organizational setting, the challenge of conflict lies in how one chooses to deal with it. Concealed, avoided or otherwise ignored, conflict will likely fester only to grow into resentment, create withdrawal or cause factional infighting within an organization.

So, what creates conflict in the workplace? Opposing positions, competitive tensions, power struggles, ego, pride, jealousy, performance discrepancies, compensation issues, just someone having a bad day, etc. While the answer to the previous question would appear to lead to the conclusion that just about anything and everything creates conflict, the reality is that the root of most conflict is either born out of poor communication or the inability to control one's emotions. Let's examine these 2 major causes of conflict:

Communication:

If you reflect back upon conflicts you have encountered over the years, you'll quickly recognize many of them resulted from a lack of information, poor information, no information, or misinformation. Let's assume for a moment that you were lucky enough to have received good information, but didn't know what to do with it...That is still a communication problem, which in turn can lead to conflict. Clear, concise, accurate, and timely communication of information will help to ease both the number and severity of conflicts.

Emotions:

Another common mistake made in workplace communications which leads to conflict is letting emotions drive decisions. I have witnessed otherwise savvy executives place the need for emotional superiority ahead of achieving their mission (not that they always understood this at the time). Case in point - have you ever witnessed an employee throw a fit of rage and draw the regrettable *line in the sand* in the heat of the moment? If you have, what you

really watched was a person indulging their emotions rather than protecting their future.

The very bane of human existence, which is in fact human nature itself, will always create gaps in thinking & philosophy, and no matter how much we all wish it wasn't so...it is. So the question then becomes how to effectively deal with conflict when it arises. It is essential for organizational health and performance that conflict be accepted and addressed through effective conflict resolution processes. While having a conflict resolution structure is important, effective utilization of conflict resolution processes is ultimately dependant upon the ability of all parties to understand the benefits of conflict resolution, and perhaps more importantly, their desire to resolve the matter.

Tips

The following tips will help to more effectively handle conflicts in the workplace:

1. Define Acceptable Behavior:

You know what they say about assuming...Just having a definition for what constitutes acceptable behavior is a positive step in avoiding conflict. Creating a framework for decisioning, using a published delegation of authority statement, encouraging sound business practices in collaboration, team building, leadership development, and talent management will all help avoid conflicts. Having clearly defined job descriptions so that people know what's expected of them, and a well articulated chain of command to allow for effective communication will also help avoid conflicts. Clearly and publicly make it known what will and won't be tolerated.

2. Hit Conflict Head-on:

While you can't always prevent conflicts, it has been my experience that the secret to conflict resolution is in fact conflict prevention where possible. By actually seeking out areas of potential conflict and proactively intervening in a just and decisive fashion you will likely prevent certain conflicts from ever arising. If a conflict does flare up, you will likely minimize its severity by dealing with it quickly. Time spent identifying and understanding natural tensions will help to avoid unnecessary conflict.

3. Understanding the WIIFM Factor:

Understanding the other professionals WIIFM (What's In It For Me) position is critical. It is absolutely essential to understand other's motivations prior to weighing in. The way to avoid conflict is to help those around you achieve their

objectives. If you approach conflict from the perspective of taking the action that will help others best achieve their goals you will find few obstacles will stand in your way with regard to resolving conflict.

4. The Importance Factor:

Pick your battles and avoid conflict for the sake of conflict. However if the issue is important enough to create a conflict then it is surely important enough to resolve. If the issue, circumstance, or situation is important enough, and there is enough at stake, people will do what is necessary to open lines of communication and close positional and/or philosophical gaps.

5. View Conflict as Opportunity:

Hidden within virtually every conflict is the potential for a tremendous teaching/learning opportunity. Where there is disagreement there is an inherent potential for growth and development. If you're a CEO who doesn't leverage conflict for team building and leadership development purposes you're missing a great opportunity. Divergent positions addressed properly can stimulate innovation and learning in ways like minds can't even imagine. Smart leaders look for the upside in all differing opinions.

Bottom line...I believe resolution can normally be found with conflicts where there is a sincere desire to do so. Turning the other cheek, compromise, forgiveness, compassion, empathy, finding common ground, being an active listener, service above self, and numerous other approaches will always allow one to be successful in building rapport if the underlying desire is strong enough. However, when all else fails and positional gaps cannot be closed, resolve the issue not by playing favorites, but by doing the right thing.

As always, I'm interested in your thoughts, experiences and comments...

Follow me on Twitter [@mikemyatt](https://twitter.com/mikemyatt)