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Staff Management Advice

Conflict Resolution Doesn't Have to be a Battle

"The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem."
 - Theodore Isaac Rubin, psychiatrist and author

Conflict is nearly unavoidable in the workplace and can result from a myriad of factors. While initially unpleasant, conflict is not necessarily detrimental to a team. In fact, conflict can lead to new ideas that benefit the organization as a whole, but only if you approach and manage the situation properly. Here's how:

Keep an open mind

Part of successful conflict resolution is remembering that the person you are disagreeing with is not an opponent, but a colleague. You both have the same goal in mind: to strengthen the company. The ideal outcome is not for someone to "win," but for the best possible solution to be reached. So, in the initial stages of conflict, even though it may be difficult, try viewing the discussion from your colleague's perspective. To do so, put your assumptions, opinions and emotions aside. A win-win resolution is hard to achieve if you are fixated on only one solution - yours. By acting from the largest possible perspective, you invite collaboration from the start.

Be a good listener

Usually, people hear only a limited amount of information when engaged in conflict because they are focused on convincing others that their approach is best. With this in mind, remember that active listening is essential. At its core, active listening involves respecting differences and accepting contradictory opinions. Paraphrasing, clarifying, validating and summarizing your colleague's points will allow both of you to weigh the dialogue as you work through your conflict. Additionally, if you truly listen to him or her, your colleague will be more inclined to listen to you.

Asking open-ended questions also can help move the discussion forward. Consider queries such as:

- What do you see as the best solution to this situation?
- What information do we need to determine the ideal solution?
- Is there another way to look at this situation that will allow us to reach a consensus?

By eliciting responses to these and other, similar questions, you can gather valuable information, honor your colleague's position and maintain the possibility of reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

Remain respectful

Adopting an attitude of appreciation and gratitude is often the final step in ensuring a resolution that suits everyone's needs is reached. Even if you are not completely satisfied with the ultimate decision, taking on a defensive attitude may only hamper the implementation of the solution and the resolution of future conflicts.

This article is provided courtesy of Robert Half Management Resources. For more information, visit www.roberthalfmr.com.

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