

Conflict Mediation: Managing Workplace Conflict

Unfortunately, if you've ever had to interact with the general public, you'll know that workplace conflict is inevitable. Personalities will clash, employees will be unreasonable with each other, it's going to happen. Hopefully this guide will help in the mediation of these conflicts.

Signs of an Employee Conflict

- Employee may tell you there is a conflict
- Increased absenteeism or an employee is avoiding interactions with a co-worker
- Employees may be arguing beyond what you consider reasonable or attacking a co-worker personally or emotionally through verbal spars.
 - Arguments and disagreements can be healthy in the workplace when done with respect and professionalism, but can dovetail into personal or emotional attacks, so it's important to recognize the difference.

Steps to Get to Conflict Mediation

Before jumping straight to a mediation when you recognize a conflict between co-workers, encourage them to try working out the conflict amongst themselves. You can encourage employees to address their own conflicts with the following tips:

1. Remain calm and assume best intentions
 - a. Often times conflict can escalate due to high emotions or misinterpretations of actions. Assuming best intentions and keeping your emotions in tact can help lead to an amenable solution between both sides.
2. Listen to understand
 - a. It can be tempting when conflicting with a co-worker to want them to understand your position, in the hopes of "winning the argument," but it's equally important for you to understand their side. Once you understand their perspective, it may actually make it easier for you to help them understand yours.
3. Be sincere
 - a. While it's important to be tactful and respectful, it's just as important to be sincere in your approach. Tact and respect without sincerity will come across phony and may cause distrust.
4. Focus on the future, not the past
 - a. The past happened and you can't change it, but it doesn't have to dictate the relationship moving forward.
5. Pick your battles
 - a. In any negotiation or conflict resolution, it's rare anybody gets exactly what they want. Instead, a win-win situation is one where both sides find their priorities are met. Knowing what you prioritize and what you care less about makes it easier to come to a resolution where both sides feel they came out as a winner, even if they had to make some concessions.
6. Know when and if the conflict should be escalated
 - a. Ideally, when two parties come together to resolve their conflict, things improve after, but this isn't always the case. If you find you were unsuccessful in resolving a conflict with a peer, it may be necessary to move on to the next step, which would be involving a supervisor, so that the supervisor can oversee a conflict mediation.

Running a Conflict Mediation

1. Host the conflict mediation in a neutral space that does not favor one employee over another. As the mediator, you want to ensure avoiding bias, and the perception of bias.
2. Set ground rules. Ask all parties to treat each other with respect and to make an effort to listen and understand others' views. Have the parties agree to the ground rules without proceeding forward.
3. Ask each participant to describe the conflict, including desired changes. Direct participants to use "I" statements, not "you" statements. They should focus on specific behaviors and problems rather than people.
4. Ask participants to restate what others have said. This will allow you to assess if the parties have been using active listening and truly understand each other's perspectives.
5. Summarize the conflict based on what you have heard and obtain agreement from participants. This will ensure everyone is on the same page and has a mutual understanding of the situation.
6. Brainstorm solutions. Discuss all of the options in a positive manner. As the mediator, you are encouraged to have the parties propose solutions as well.
7. Rule out any options that participants agree are unworkable.
8. Summarize all possible options for a solution.
9. Assign further analysis of each option to individual participants.
10. Make sure all parties agree on the next steps.
11. Close the meeting by thanking the participants and asking participants to thank each other for working to resolve the conflict.

References:

<https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/toolkits/managing-workplace-conflict>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-mediate-conflict>