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# Five Habits For Successfully Managing Workplace Conflict



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Have you ever explored your relationship with conflict? Is it something you avoid? Do you face it head on? Prior to immersing myself in the world of leadership coaching, I thought that conflict was something to be avoided at all costs in order to preserve the peace. Given that I grew up with parents from the silent generation, it makes sense that I was taught to believe that if we don't talk about it, then it's not an issue.

It wasn't until many years later when I learned the term "productive conflict" that I discovered the gift of working through problems in any given relationship. In professional settings, we might dread the idea of having difficult conversations with our team members. Yet it's the only way to develop the types of relationships that can endure challenges and exhibit the resilience needed in a complex work environment. Having the right tools to manage adversity can build trust and deepen the bonds between people. But not everyone is going to embrace stepping out of their comfort zone to stretch their muscles for dealing with confrontational circumstances in a constructive manner.

Many of my clients find it helpful to explore frameworks that can guide the process of managing conflict productively. Here are five habits to cultivate during that process.

**Shift your mindset.** The first paradigm to shift is the idea that conflict is negative. Psychology professor [Bruce Tuckman](#) first introduced the idea in 1965 that small groups of individuals go through various stages of development (forming, norming, storming and performing) as they evolve from being strangers to performing as a high-functioning team with a common purpose. Along that journey, learning to work through the challenging situations in the storming phase influences their ability to perform. This is a great reminder that working through obstacles is part of heightening a team's ability to accomplish its goals.

**Consider other perspectives.** Opposing ideas are often the result of looking at situations from different perspectives. If we can suspend our judgment about holding different viewpoints long enough to appreciate the benefits that might come from having a diversity of thoughts, then it becomes easier to resolve

differences. In fact, inviting people to express different perspectives than their own during meetings is a good way of practicing this habit.

**Separate facts from stories.** If we can develop the ability to separate the facts of a situation from the story we tell ourselves, then we are exercising a level of emotional intelligence that can serve to depersonalize any circumstance.

However, our brains are wired to process information quickly. Creating stories is a default mechanism that we need to train ourselves to recognize so we can catch ourselves when we're operating on autopilot.

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**Speak with candor.** There are so many reasons why many people shy away from having the difficult conversations that are a necessary ingredient in managing conflict productively. We do each other a huge disservice when we don't have the courage to speak with candor and compassion. Taking accountability for your thoughts and feelings and communicating those in a way that creates the space for dialogue takes practice. One way to create that habit is to check in with yourself and assess whether what you feel on the inside is matching what you express on the outside, both verbally and nonverbally. If the answer is no, you can take a small step in that direction by acknowledging what you're feeling and choosing to share it. As a leader, you can encourage your team members to speak with candor by creating a process that incorporates this feedback piece into projects and meetings.

**Remember your common purpose.** Reminding a group of its shared purpose can be a strong anchor to keep different people focused during challenging times. When individuals can rally as a team behind a common goal, they can be unstoppable.

If the people within your organization can develop the skills to approach conflict by practicing the five habits described above, then no matter how many difficulties they face, they will be sharpening the tools that will help them become true leaders. They'll become the kind of leaders who aren't afraid of conflict but rather embrace it as a natural part of life that can be a true gift if it's managed productively.

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