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Workplace Conflict Resolution: What's Creating Workplace Conflict and 9 Easy Ways to Resolve It

By Arlyne Diamond



A radio interviewer recently asked me if I thought there was more conflict in the workplace today than in the past. After thinking about it, I replied, "Yes, I think there is more conflict today."

Here are three main reasons:

1. Today's workplace is much more egalitarian. We have flatter chains of command, dotted line relationships, and primarily knowledge workers who are capable of making decisions themselves and have the freedom to move on to another job if they don't like the way they are being treated.

In prior years, the workplace consisted of a clear authoritarian structure and chain of command. Workers obeyed orders, kept their gripes and personal

issues to themselves, and did their work. If they failed to perform effectively, they were immediately fired and replaced.

2. Today, people of all ages from all over the world have come to work together. They have different values, goals, behavioral expectations, and prior experiences. Yet they are expected to work together without really understanding why all the misunderstandings between them occur.
3. Women are now in the workplace in equal numbers to their male counterparts. Although we've come a long way towards understanding each other and working harmoniously together in the workplace, there are still behavioral differences in teasing, flirting, confrontation, aggression, and simple communication styles.

Solutions to Conflicts in the Workplace

Clearly, these workplace issues are here to stay. How can we handle them? How can we change certain elements? Here are some of my ideas:

Dealing with Different People in the Workplace

Your organization is going to continue to have people of all genders, ages, cultures, styles, and expectations working together. You need to provide them with:

- A common culture with clearly defined behavioral expectations. This includes policy, procedures, statements of corporate values, and culture – and the follow through to hold people accountable.
- Diversity training that teaches how to manage different people as well as how to get them to cooperate at meetings and other group forums. Your organization needs to delve into training. Trainers need to understand cognitive and communication styles, values around politeness, and dealing with superiors, as well as issues of pride, humility, conformity, and all the other differences that cause conflicts in the workplace.
- Acceptance and recognition of differences, so your organization doesn't try to have a "one size fits all" method of managing.
- More attempts to help each other clear up disagreements and misunderstandings – rather than passing judgment and deciding who is right and who is wrong.

Management Style and Hours Worked

When management creates a clear set of guidelines as to work expectations, and measures success rather than time spent, it will be easier for people to know what to do because the parameters are clear. Here's what your organization can do to avoid conflicts in the workplace related to management styles:

- Publish policy, procedures, values, expectations, and guidelines. Since there no longer is a supervisor with a whip

looking over each worker's shoulder, it is these documents that guide your employees' behaviors.

- Managers need to learn how to correctly manage different individuals to enable each person to be successful. Some people need more instruction and others need to be left alone to create. Some are more trustworthy than others and can be relied upon to know their own limits and decision-making authority. Others need to be managed more tightly.
- Reward the quality and the quantity of the work, not time. Managers need to stop the subtle and not-so-subtle remarks about not seeing a worker on a Saturday or early in the morning.
- Employees need to have flexible time whenever possible. Some jobs require attendance at set hours. Most do not. People with young children at home might want to go home for a few hours in the late afternoon and return either to work, or to their home computer after their children have been put to bed.
- Recognize that less is often more. If people get to relax, have a family life, recreation, and pleasure, they are almost always more productive and creative during their working time.

Although conflict is here to stay, it certainly can be mitigated by taking the needs and differences of people seriously and by teaching them about each other and how to work together. Stop being afraid and start being kind.

About the author:

With 30+ years of experience in specializing in people and processes in the workplace, Organizational Development and Human Resource Consultant, Arlyne Diamond, PhD can teach your management team how to manage your organization effectively and efficiently. For more free tips that will help your organization increase its productivity by cutting the number of conflicts in the workplace in half go to: www.diamondassociates.net/articles