

## Put Your New Skills Into Practice

Take a look at these phrases and actions. Can you determine which will help end the conflict and which will make it worse?

- A.** You're irresponsible.  
**B.** I feel like I'm overloaded with work — I could use some help.  
**Answer: B.** Try to use "I" statements and avoid placing blame.  
**A.** That's an interesting point of view. Let's make a list of pros and cons.  
**B.** That's a ridiculous idea. It will never work.  
**Answer: A.** Avoid judgments and insults. Consider different solutions carefully before dismissing or implementing them.

*When listening to a point of view I don't agree with, I:*

- A.** Sit with my legs crossed, my arms folded and a frown on my face  
**B.** Stand up, walk around, fidget and/or move closer to the person speaking  
**C.** Stay relaxed, with an open body posture and a positive facial expression  
**Answer: C.** Crossed arms and legs and a scowling expression make you appear resistant to ideas. Standing up, moving around or advancing toward the speaker can be seen as intimidating. A relaxed, calm posture and a neutral or smiling expression show that you are listening actively.

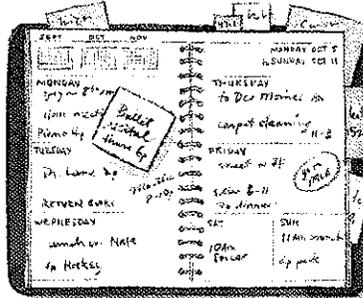
*When someone is speaking, I:*

- A.** Use the time to think about what I'm going to say next  
**B.** Maintain eye contact, nod and take notes  
**Answer: B.** Half of conflict resolution is just listening. Don't always strive to further your own point of view or fight to be right.

## The Conflict-Stress Connection

Stress and conflict at work are connected. If you're involved in conflict, you will probably feel stressed. In turn, the short temper, fatigue and ill feelings caused by stress can lead to more disagreements. Keep these strategies in mind and control stress:

- **AVOID** people, topics and situations that make you uncomfortable. This doesn't mean avoiding conflict. Differences are part of life, and working things out is crucial to healthy relationships. However, if you find that a specific situation, discussion topic or person creates feelings of anger and stress for you, find a graceful way to steer clear.  
 ● **KNOW** your limits. Being overwhelmed with multiple demands leads to stress, and having too much on your plate can cause you to fall behind on tasks and break promises — leading to conflict. Manage your time and your workload. If you're struggling, talk to your supervisor.



- **BREATHE** deeply. It sounds simple, and it is. One of the best ways to let go of anger, frustration and stress is to take 10 deep breaths. Imagine the fresh air going all the way down to your toes. Breathe slowly and give your mind time to clear (along with your lungs).  
 ● **TAKE** control. One step toward stress management is to take charge of what's within your control, and let go of what isn't. If you can fix the problem, do so. If it's a situation you can't do anything about, resolve not to worry.

**Final thought:** Realize that change, disagreements, interruptions, mistakes and unforeseen events are all part of a day's work. Try to take them in stride. When you feel anger and frustration, don't ignore them — recognizing your emotions can help you manage them better and save you energy to handle whatever comes your way.

## Work It Out

### Resolving Conflicts at Work



## Conflict Meets Cooperation

Work brings together different ideas, personalities and work styles. Occasional conflicts and disagreements on the job are sure to surface.

Conflict can be productive when differing points of view spark positive change, give birth to new ideas or bring better understanding. Working through different points of view can help you grow personally and professionally.

**Conflict has a downside too. It can spiral out of control, hurting relationships and leading to "toxic" behavior, lower-quality work, mistakes and even violence.**

**You can't avoid conflict altogether, but you can learn to handle it in healthy ways to get positive results. The information in this brochure can help.**

### The 5 C's of Conflict: Choose One

- 1 **Confront.** Don't let conflict fester and weaken relationships. Confront the person directly, discuss the problem calmly and resolve it.
- 2 **Concede.** Recognize that some problems can't be resolved. Sometimes agreeing to disagree is a good solution. Decide that it doesn't matter who "wins" and move on.
- 3 **Compromise.** Find common ground. Maybe you can each give up something to satisfy a larger goal.
- 4 **Collaborate.** Work together. Use mutual strengths and skills to find a solution to the problem. Think of it as "us" against "the issue" instead of "me" against "you."
- 5 **Cool off.** Manage your anger appropriately. When tempers flare, take a break. Find a way to let off steam — take a brisk walk, write in a journal or call a friend. Don't return to the discussion until your anger has passed.



**FORGIVE.** Let go of personal grudges, accept an apology if it's offered and give the other person a chance to move on from mistakes.

## Ready for Resolution?

Quarreling for the sake of being right wastes time and doesn't solve the problem. Successful solutions are often reached through negotiation. There's a right way to negotiate, one that leads to a peaceful resolution and the feeling that everyone walks away from the table a winner. These tips can help you negotiate well in almost any situation.

- **CHOOSE neutral territory.** Have your discussion in a place where all parties feel comfortable, but that isn't anyone's personal "territory." A conference room or coffee shop might be a good choice.
- **DEFINE the problem.** Start by asking questions: "What do you think the problem is?" or "What do you feel we are fighting about?" Get as specific as you can about the issue you hope to resolve.
- **STICK to the issue.** Now that you've defined the problem, set boundaries for the discussion. Decide to accept any comments related to the issue on the table and all ideas for solving it. Other unrelated topics, such as past behaviors or offenses, are off-limits.
- **AVOID personal insults or commentary.** Negotiating turns into fighting once the discussion gets personal. Try to use the word "I" to start your statements, instead of "you." "I'd like to feel as though everyone takes our weekly meeting seriously," is less inflammatory than "You're late for our meeting every week."

- **LISTEN actively.** Don't do all the talking. Keep an open mind and take notes on what the other person says if it helps you focus. Maintain a relaxed body posture and don't let angry feelings keep you from hearing what's truly being said.
- **ASK for help.** Some conflicts need a third party for resolution. Consider asking a neutral mediator to step in and help sort through everyone's comments.
- **MAKE peace within yourself.**

Finally, realize that you can't control what others say or do, but you can control your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. If you decide to stop fighting, your role in prolonging the conflict will end.

## When Conflict Gets Out of Hand

Nobody likes to think about it, but workplace violence is a real threat. Maybe you've tried negotiating and are still experiencing conflict, or maybe you've been threatened and are concerned someone could become violent. Take hostility seriously and take action.

### Warning signs of possible violent behavior:

- Physical or verbal threats
- Recurring conflict with co-workers
- Disruptive emotional problems
- Poor performance
- Erratic and rude behavior



### WHAT TO DO:

**Tell a supervisor about your fears, avoid escalating the conflict, practice good negotiation skills and protect yourself.**

**Thankfully, most work conflicts don't end in violence. But it is a good idea to be prepared.**