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## THE BLOG

# How To Deal With Conflict at Work

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It seems particularly apropos given our current political and social climate to pay lip service to conflict. We have to deal with it often, despite our best attempts to avoid it. Fortunately some conflict is minor and innocuous, whereas other instances of conflict are incendiary and damaging.

No matter the scale, the consequence, or the context, understanding how to deal with conflict at any stage is a life skill. I know that some people are even crippled by the thought of conflict. I think that any conflict-related fears arise because we are never taught how to grapple with such moments..

Thankfully there is no time like the present to pick up a few new tricks!

### The Two Roots of Conflict

Generally conflict arises from incompatibilities in goals or perspectives between two or



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more parties. Conflict can also arise when two or more parties pull from the same pool of resources.

In simple terms there are two main provenances for conflict, be it in personal relationships or business relationships.

### Individual Differences.

Each person brings a mixed and varied bag of wants, needs, values, beliefs, opinions, assumptions, and interpretations to the table in any given situation. Chances are there will be disparities between two people on at least one of those fronts. This can be a source of conflict, and contingent upon the nature of that disparity, it can be a source of great conflict.

Be that as it may, we don't have to combat someone who is at odds with us on one or more of those points. The key to successful communication in those instances is depersonalization. Remind yourself that although what the person says may relate to you or undercut your beliefs, it isn't about you until they make it about you.

### Stylistic Clashes.

Style can mean a number of things. In my mind, style refers to mode of communication, as in how people speak. That spans the gamut of tone, language, reasoning, attitude, bodily cues, and so on. There are many conflicts that crop up or are exacerbated by stylistic differences.

Although this might appear trivial, packaging is very important to us human beings. The way we communicate largely affects how we are perceived, how are ideas are received, and how likely we are to accomplish our goals.

### Two Types of Conflict

Most conflicts can be grouped into one of 2 types.

#### Manifest Conflict.

This is the type of conflict most people envision when they hear the word "conflict." It's in your face disagreement between two or more people. This kind of conflict tends to escalate quickly, and people tend to shutdown, staying in their corners without giving in. The word that epitomizes where both people err in Manifest Conflict is competition.

#### Latent Conflict.

Latent Conflict is much more difficult to diagnose. This type of conflict is characterized by an inability to communicate openly about the source of conflict or the emotions that it prods. Perhaps the subject matter is too sensitive, or the power dynamics preclude dialogue, so people tend to find others ways of venting their frustrations. The problem is that those accrue at the subconscious level.

Now that we have covered some common sources of conflict and the way in which they play out, we are ready to move on to conflict resolution.

### Conflict Resolution



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Ideally conflict resolution aims to pacify the source of disagreement between people and to help each come to a satisfactory agreement.

## General Rules

First, describe the conflict. Harken back to 1st grade when you learn “Who, What, Where, When,” but skip the “Why.” At this point it is absolutely crucial to only state the facts, free of interpretation. Each person embroiled in the conflict must do this until everyone has agreed on a version of the situation; or agreed to disagree.

Second, review what the consequences of the conflict are. Think about what is being lost, what is being halted, what is being compromised. This can help put the conflict into a greater context and reduce tensions through pragmatism.

And third, hash out the potential benefits of resolving the conflict. What can be gained by the people directly and indirectly related? When you do this you have crafted a comprehensive picture of both the positive and negative impacts of the conflict. A complete picture of the situation can provide some much needed separation from personal feelings.

## Reclaim the Relationship and Move Forward

In the midst of a conflict we can say things that we don't really mean or wouldn't say upon careful reflection. Sometimes it's because we want to win; sometimes it's because we want to injure; and sometimes, we just get carried away.

There are three ingredients that when taken in conjunction, reduce emotional tension and foster safety in a conflict-riddle situation.

**Confidence.** Have the confidence to say what you need to say and know that you can say it without hurting the other person.

**Humility.** Realize you don't have a monopoly on the truth. Others have valuable input and together you can come to a better understanding of the given situation.

**Skill.** Share delicate information willingly. Be vulnerable and don't regret it. People will be grateful for your honesty.

And then there are 5 tactics that can help you continue a conversation without impinging on safety or exacerbating emotions.

**Share your facts.** Share what you know and put aside assumptions and conjectures.

Tell your story. Explain your realizations and how you got to what you think you know. Be process oriented.

Ask for others' paths. Encourage others' to explain their realizations and how they got to what they think they know. Urge them to also be process oriented.

**Talk tentatively.** Don't use absolute terms. Leave room for error in what you say. Make it clear that it is your perception, and don't disguise it as fact.

**Encourage testing.** Make it safe for other's to try their theories without fear of being recriminated or brushed off. Don't launch into a monologue. Don't get indignant. Hold your beliefs but don't bang people over the head with them.

## I Am a Businessman After All

Some of you may be wondering how the heck this could work in a professional environment without devolving into a kumbaya circle. Well, you know what I say?

Professionals should be more willing to talk openly while paying deference to their emotions because choosing to ignore the role they play in conflicts doesn't mean they aren't playing a role.

Emotions, assumption, experience, and beliefs all influence the way we go about our daily lives, and if you are in society that means you are affecting others. Learning how to mitigate the impact of those aspects of human psychology on conflict resolution is necessary, be it a business context or not.

### About the Author

*Anurag Harsh wears many hats. He is an entrepreneur, a public company executive, a digital guru, a blogger, a McGraw-Hill published author, an angel investor, and a classical musician who has performed two sold out solo concerts at Carnegie Hall ([www.carnegieconcert.com](http://www.carnegieconcert.com)). Follow him on <https://twitter.com/anuragharsh>*

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