OFFICE LIFE

Want to resolve more conflicts? Start using this rule

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It's a simple and effective way to address conflict in the workplace. However, it takes time and practice. Most people resist it initially.

"It's always easy to blame others. You can spend your entire life blaming the world, but your success and failures are entirely your own responsibility." — Paulo Coelho

Most of us want to be right — that's why we fail to solve conflicts at work or personally.

Blaming is an easy way out — we make someone else responsible rather than owning our part. That's why simple issues escalate into bigger problems. We want to win the argument at any cost.

Playing the blame game fuels more tensions. Being right becomes more important than solving the issue at hand.

The best way to solve conflict is to own your part. That's the principle behind the 50–50 rule — blame yourself, not just others.

You are also accountable

"When you blame others, you give up your power to change."
— Robert Anthony

Couples with poor conflict resolution skills typically engage in Fight, Flight, or Freeze behaviors. Those who've learned to overcome tensions, last the longest. That's why I stick to the 50%-50% rule — when something goes wrong, I'm equally responsible.

I came up with this rule many years ago. I started putting it in practice with my wife — it has helped to stick together for over 20 years.

I usually share the 50–50 rule when coaching teams — it's a simple and effective way to address conflict in the workplace. However, it takes time and practice. Most people resist it initially — no one wants to blame themselves.

This approach suggests that you blame yourself for 50% of a specific issue regardless of what happened or not. It feels counterintuitive, right? The point is not to make you more or less guilty — the goal is for you to approach conflict as equal. When no one is either fully right or wrong, it's easier to focus on the solution.

Creating an even field moves us from blame to introspection — you focus on finding a solution, not on finger-pointing. The power of the 50–50 rule is that it makes both parties equally accountable. Each side shares equal responsibility for:

- Having caused the problem

- Finding the best way to solve it

- Benefitting from the solution

The 50–50 rule not only removes the blame, but it also shifts our mindset.

1. From being right to integrating perspectives

Most people approach conflict as a battle — being right equals to winning. The problem is no one wants to be proven wrong. Shift the conversation from right-or-wrong to integrating opposite perspectives.

2. From taking sides to being fair

When you must choose between two choices, you usually end solving the wrong problem. Unask the question instead. Taking sides will only make one person extremely happy and the other one very upset — it will fuel more tensions. The 50–50 rule brings fairness by eliminating the sides.

3. From being defensive to empathizing

Tensions turn people against each other — they see the other part as the enemy. Removing emotions is critical to driving resolution. When there's no right or wrong, people put their energy on understanding each other's needs and perspectives.

4. From blaming others to collaborating

Blaming is an easy way out. It's easier to point fingers than to realize that we all can improve our behavior. Acknowledging that everyone is equally accountable shifts the focus from blaming to collaborating.

5. From winning to solving the problem

The end result of collaboration is to approach conflict with a problem-solving mentality. Winning is not about defeating the other side but finding a solution that will benefit everyone.

How to make the 50–50 rule work for you

"Great leaders don't rush to blame. They instinctively look for solutions." — Nina Easton

Taking ownership of our actions, rather than blaming others, dramatically improves our performance. That's the key benefit of the 50–50 rule.

Researchers at Stanford and the University of Michigan found that companies that attributed their problems to their actions instead to external factors perform much better.

Here are some tips to get you started.

1. Own your part:

Next time you have a conflict, rather than blame the other part, reflect on what you can improve. Ask yourself: What can I do better? How are my behavior or attitudes — intentionally or not — adding fuel to the fire? What can I change on my end?

2. Remind others of the 50–50 rule:

The upside of owning your part is that people must be accountable for theirs too — the 50–50 rule is a two-way street. For things to work, both sides must be aware and play under the same principle.

3. Look what's right on each side:

Building on what's already working gets quicker results than focusing on what's wrong. By removing the blame, you can focus on what each side is right about. Build on both by applying a "Yes, and…" approach.

4. Promote dialogue:

Arguments take us nowhere — we try to defeat others, rather than understand what's going on. Ask questions, invite people to reflect and have a productive conversation. Understanding requires time and effort, but it's more effective than quick fixes.

5. Encourage empathy:

Focus on understanding the other person, instead of trying to assume that you know her/ him. Most tensions are not about an issue intrinsically but emotional entanglement. People get upset because they don't feel understood — effective conflict resolution requires walking in the other person's shoes. Be patient and listen.

6. Step aside:

If you are the decision-maker (a manager, parent, etc.), don't try to be the hero. It's tempting to be the smartest guy in the room who comes up with a wise solution. Let those affected find the solutions — it drives more buy-in. Unless it's a life-threatening situation, don't feel forced to decide on behalf of others.

7. Suggest a time-out:

Silence is the think-tank of the soul, as I explained here. Sometimes, taking distance from our problems allows the solution to show up uninvited. When conflict gets too personal, it's almost impossible to see things through with clarity. Let things simmer down.

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The 50–50 rule shift the focus from being right to solving the problem. Blaming yourself partially removes the need of pointing finger at others. By owning your part, you become accountable for solving the conflict.

Give it a try. Let me know how it works for you.

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