

CLD1-7



Understanding and Dealing with Conflict

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Conflict is as common as rain. Whenever people come in contact with each other, conflict will arise. It stems from differences in opinions or objectives. It may be rooted in our basic competitive nature or the desire to meet competing needs. Conflict is not always bad. In fact, it may be needed to keep organizations growing. It does not have to ruin relationships.

There are a number of ways to respond to conflict, and the response will depend on the situation. Avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, and collaborating are all responses to conflict. No single response is always right or always wrong. The response you take should depend on the circumstances and potential outcome.

- **Avoidance** is not just the coward's way out. It may be the most appropriate response when the issue is trivial, when more time is needed to find a solution, or when someone else may handle the situation better.
- **Accommodation**, or giving in, is the best solution when one party recognizes he or she is wrong. It may also be the most appropriate response when the issue is more important to the other person or when the relationship is more important than the issue.

- **Competition** in conflict means that someone wins and someone loses. This is the appropriate response when the issue is vitally important and decisive action is needed. If safety or survival is at stake, then winning is important.
- **Compromise** is an attempt to find common ground in the conflict. Both sides need to be willing to share power or give up some ground to reach a shared solution. It may be the appropriate solution when the objective is not worth a fight or when it is crucial to reach a settlement.
- **Collaboration** is an attempt to satisfy the desires of both parties. It may not be easy because of the need to bring together insights from competing views. Both parties need to be willing to test personal assumptions and agree on shared solutions. It is the appropriate response when consensus is important and the concerns are too important for compromise.

While individuals may have a natural preference toward one conflict response or another, using one response in all situations is not appropriate. There are times to avoid and times to compete. An awareness of the situation and the potential consequences should guide the response. If the outcome doesn't matter or if time would resolve the



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– Anonymous

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conflict, avoidance could be the best solution. If someone's life could be at stake, it would be important for the person with the "right way" to win the battle.

Helpful Tips

The responses may differ, but there are some basic do's and don'ts for dealing with conflict.

- For starters, "Calm down!" The old adage "Even a straight pin is no good if it loses its head" applies in conflict resolution.
- Find a place and a time to talk.
- Ask questions, and listen more than you talk.
- Focus on the problem, not the person.
- If compromise or collaboration is needed, maintain a positive attitude and an open mind.

Overall, keep the objective in mind! Conflict is inevitable and may even be helpful, but the end result should be to resolve the conflict, not let it fester and grow.

Barriers to Resolution

Several factors hinder conflict resolution. Most of them are communication issues.

- Nonverbal communication is often more significant than what we say. Open- or close-mindedness can be communicated very effectively without saying a word.
- Verbal communication can be quite disruptive if it includes harsh language, insults, blame or threats.
- Interruptions or a refusal to listen are other obvious communication barriers.
- Sarcasm is seldom helpful in resolving conflict. It may be more subtle but is no less damaging than harsh words.
- Finally, don't make excuses, change the subject, try to read the other person's mind, or put words in that person's mouth.

Summary

While it isn't possible to manage a life free of conflict, we can manage our response to conflict. Every situation will be different; the responses will also be different. Understanding the appropriate response can help make a conflict a productive—rather than destructive—fact of life.

References

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