

Six Paths to Managing Conflict with Peers

Take a walk in your peers' shoes. Try to understand their point of view, motivation, and reaction to the conflict. Ask for examples to clarify the issues. Rephrase, restate, or summarize what you think has been said. Focus on the other person's words and behavior rather than on your assumptions. Examine the flaws in your position.

Create a solution together. Identify each other's motives, goals, and agendas. Look for points of mutual agreement and interdependence. Begin with less complicated issues, then work toward resolving more difficult ones. Together, suggest possible solutions without evaluating them and then narrow the choices to the best two or three. Select a solution or combination of solutions that best meets each person's needs.

Positively express emotions. Watch out for your hot buttons. Be sure that your expression of emotions is helpful to the process. Explain how you feel and why. Choose your words carefully. Keep them courteous and professional. Don't cast blame. Express your desire to understand. Ask if the other person understands your feelings. Encourage the other person to express their feelings. Admit responsibility for your part in the conflict. Ask what you can do to make amends. If you have caused emotional distress, sincerely apologize, and mean it.

Reach out and touch someone. Think about how you want to be viewed after the conflict is over. Follow up with the person with whom you were in conflict. Take (or make) the opportunity to talk informally with your peers outside of work projects—meet them for lunch, acknowledge birthdays, ask about their interests.

Reflect and understand. Note your initial reaction to a conflict and analyze why you had that reaction. Consider the impact of differences in style and opinions between you and your peers. Review alternative reactions and the pros and cons of each. Solicit input from other parties (if appropriate) and allow them to raise issues. Organize your thoughts and strategies. Give your peer time to reflect. Remind yourself that a delay in responding isn't the same as avoiding or ignoring the conflict.

Go with the flow. Look forward, not back. Find the best in people and in the situation. Always look toward adapting and accepting. Communicate optimism. Seek out sympathetic co-workers or friends when you need to “unload” or need a pep talk. If opportunities to reconcile or resolve the conflict fail, keep trying. Stay professional in your attitude, words, and behavior. Avoid sarcasm and cynicism, and keep a sense of humor.