

## Why Managing Conflict Is Important

Since 1983 the Center for Creative Leadership has conducted research on derailment – contrasting those people who make it to the top with people who were once successful but in the end were demoted, fired, or sidelined. In the research, successful managers were described as those who seek out, build, and maintain effective relationships with others. They listen – willingly, actively, and patiently. They willingly receive feedback and effectively respond to it. They support others' ideas. They perform as promised and maintain commitments. Derailed managers were described as disconnected, disagreeable, dictatorial, and divisive. They mishandled interpersonal relationships. Specific examples of their ineffective relationships include having an unresolved interpersonal conflict with a boss and showing unprofessional behavior related to a disagreement with upper management.

Conflict with your boss doesn't have to lead to derailment if you make the effort to effectively manage the situation. When you appropriately manage conflict, positive consequences can result. It can lead to a more productive working relationship between you and your boss that:

*Increases effort.* In many ways, we need our differences to help us clarify our own positions and better understand others. The chaos and confusion that naturally surrounds a search for clarity can actually energize the efforts of all.

*Airs feelings.* Instead of allowing resentment to build, feelings are dealt with openly.

*Leads to better decision making.* More information leads to better decisions, even if during a conflict situation each side hears information it doesn't want to hear.

*Exposes key issues.* Future conflict is avoided by raising important issues while there is time to address them.

*Stimulates critical thinking.* Consistently raising (and resolving) disagreements contributes to a thinking organization.

*Creates open environments.* Understanding and managing conflict robs the situation of its destructive power and builds an environment where ideas are vigorously exchanged.

*Stimulates creativity and innovation.* Creating an open forum for diverse ideas and perspectives creates space for new ideas and new ways of thinking.

On the contrary, if you mishandle a conflict, it can bring negative consequences. Poor interpersonal skills, such as an inability to manage conflict, aren't the only reason managers derail, but they were the reason cited most often in CCL's research. A mishandled or ignored conflict can have dramatic effects on personal and organizational performance that:

*Decreases productivity.* Disagreements and clashes rob an otherwise productive relationship of its energy.

*Decreases communication.* Unmanaged conflict breeds fear and resentment, which makes it more unlikely that people will voice their opinions, views, or ideas.

*Increases negative feelings.* Clashes create bruised feelings and torn relationships. At worst, the organization may lose valuable individuals who seek other employment.

*Increases stress.* Conflict takes an emotional and physical toll on the individuals involved.

*Decreases cooperation.* Organizational units, such as teams or workgroups, may split into factions and cliques, each lobbying its own viewpoint.

*Encourages backstabbing.* The work environment is poisoned with hidden agendas and back-channel maneuverings.