

Top 10 ways to manage conflict in a business

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When conflict arises in the workplace—as it inevitably does—many smaller organizations and family enterprises are not prepared to handle it. It takes some careful crafting of policies, as well as genuine self-reflection, to get the team back on track. These tips will get you started.

1. Understand and evaluate people's emotional responses When employees have strong emotional reactions to a workplace dispute, their whole internal defence mechanism may resort to a fight or flight reaction, and their ability to think and reason will typically take second place. The best strategy is to communicate with those involved after the anger and upset has dissipated. Arguing with someone who is emotionally triggered usually leads nowhere.

2. Be self-aware Are you a conflict avoider or an aggressive leader? Be aware of who you are, how you deal with conflict, and the significant impact you are having on the situation. Not everyone may respond well to your style and there will be times where you may need to adapt and demonstrate better leadership.

3. Consider the views of all parties involved No one wants to be told they are wrong. In fact, dialogue is often halted when someone is made to be wrong. Are the leaders in your organization creating conflict by not allowing others to have a voice or make contributions? Are team members too righteous to foster team work? It's important to always consider different points of view.

4. Get to the root of the issue Sometimes a conflict is a manifestation of a deeper issue, either at the management level or on the ground. A great resource is the 1981 classic bestselling book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher and William L. Ury. It provides a simple step-by-step method for getting to the source of the issue and moving beyond it.

5. Accept people for who they are and who they are not People process information and make decisions differently. Knowing how your team members approach their work provides invaluable understanding, allowing them to draw on the strength of others rather than discredit their work styles or habits.

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6. Implement regular feedback meetings Consider implementing weekly “open sessions” for the sole purpose of brainstorming what is working and what isn’t. This will allow you to address issues when they are small before they escalate.

7. Have the team create a conflict resolution protocol where everyone buys in People tend to accept what they helped to create. Investing the time to create a conflict resolution protocol will pay huge dividends in the long run.

8. Have the team adopt communication guidelines Not all forms of communications are acceptable in the workplace. Have your team recognize unacceptable and counterproductive manners of communication and create guidelines that they are willing to abide by. Include yourself in this exercise because you may be communicating in a way that is not fostering open dialogue, which in the long run may be the source of much conflict within the organization.

9. Be vigilant and enforce the measures that the team developed No one likes to deal with conflict or reprimand people. However, once there are clear conflict resolution and communication guidelines, they must be implemented in a strategic and consistent way.

10. Do you have the right people? If a team member is not functioning well or is creating conflict, evaluate if that person’s skills would be better suited for a different team or position, or whether that person fits in at your organization.

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