



Communication Tips for a Healthy Workplace

Misunderstandings and communication problems remain one of the most common sources of workplace strife. While conflict is inevitable, it need not ruin your workday or cause unbearable stress. Try these conflict resolution tips to make your work environment a less stressful, more productive place.

1. **Be specific** in formulating your complaints. "I'm never invited to meetings" is not as effective as "I wish I had been invited to last Thursday's marketing meeting."
2. **Resist the temptation to involve yourself** in conflicts that do not *directly* involve you or your responsibilities. Even if someone has clearly been wronged, allow him or her to resolve the situation as he/she chooses.
3. **Try to depersonalize** conflicts. Instead of a "me versus you" mentality, visualize an "us versus the problem" scenario.
4. In a dispute or discussion where conflicts arise, **try an exercise in listening**. Before explaining your own position, try to paraphrase and condense what the other is saying into one or two sentences. Start with, "so you're saying that..." and see how much you really understand about your rival's position. You may find that you're on the same wavelength but having problems communicating your ideas.
5. **Don't always involve your superiors** in conflict resolution. You'll quickly make the impression that you are unable to resolve the smallest difficulties.
6. If an extended discussion is necessary, **agree first** on a *time* and *place* to talk. Confronting a coworker who is with a client or working on a deadline is unfair and unprofessional. Pick a time when you are both free to concentrate on the problem and its resolution.
7. **Take it outside** - of the group of inquisitive coworkers if they're not involved in the problem. Don't try to hold negotiations when the office gossip can hear every word.
8. **Limit your complaints** to those directly involved in the workplace conflict. Character assassination is unwarranted. Remember, you need to preserve a working relationship rather than a personal one, and your opinion of a coworker's character is generally irrelevant. "He missed last week's deadline" is OK; "he's a total idiot" is not.
9. **Know when conflict isn't just conflict**. If conflict arises out of sexual, racial, or ethnic issues, or inappropriate behavior, that's not conflict, it's harassment. Take appropriate action and discuss the problem with your supervisor or human resources department.
10. **Consider a mediator** if the problem gets out of control, or if the issue is too emotional to resolve in a mutual discussion. At this step, your supervisor should be involved. You can consider using a neutral third party mediator within your own company or hiring a professional counselor.

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