

MANAGING WORKPLACE CONFLICT



With workplace conflict inevitable, it is important to remember several key strategies to minimize impact on workflow, resolve the issue in a timely manner and return to a more harmonious and productive environment.

First and foremost, make sure the conflict does not represent an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issue (like workplace harassment or discrimination) and check your company's harassment prevention policies and guidelines. If the conflict does not pertain to an EEOC issue, the following steps might be helpful.

RECOGNITION

There is little use in pretending conflict doesn't exist in hopes that it will go away. In most cases, it won't. Left to fester, the conflict and resulting discourse will grow exponentially with time and create an unpleasant work environment.

It is imperative to deal with issues as soon as possible, before conflict results in bigger problems that impact work productivity.

COMMUNICATION

After acknowledging the conflict, schedule adequate time in a suitable setting with the parties involved.

Allow all parties sufficient time to offer an explanation for the conflict. Focus on resolving the issue or problem at hand, and do not dwell on the personalities involved.

Mutual respect is key, with all parties listening without interruption. Allow time for questions to ensure understanding and clarity as to how and why the conflict occurred.

RESOLUTION

Every conflict needs a clear resolution that acknowledges hurt feelings and finds a solution that begins to mend them. Identify points where all parties agree and begin identifying a positive resolution of the conflict.

An apology can go a long way in addressing and resolving conflict. Acceptance and forgiveness are important too. Apologizing and agreeing solely for the sake of appearances can lead to grudges that deepen over time, undoing any progress made.

Conflict resolution doesn't necessarily have to end in agreement. Sometimes, it's best to agree to disagree, respectfully. In this instance, employees should acknowledge there is a difference of opinion, and come up with a solution on how to move forward.

When the parties involved cannot reach positive resolution, it is up to management to oversee the process and help employees work out their problems.