



# CONNECTIONS

*Communicating in Culturally Diverse Environments*



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## Managing Conflict: A 10 Step Program

Conflict, like death and taxes, is inevitable. This is especially true in today's culturally diverse environments where people can have dramatically different values, communication styles, work styles, and personality types. Fortunately, conflict does not have to negatively impact our lives. In fact, many organizational conflicts can be prevented, or at least minimized, if we take ten proactive steps.

**1. Provide conflict resolution training for all employees.** You can reduce the negative impact of conflict by helping employees develop the skills they need to successfully re-

solve the conflicts that occur in their lives. This gives people more confidence in their ability to resolve both personal and professional conflicts. It also makes people more effective at addressing minor conflicts as they occur, rather than allowing them to get to the point where they become major distractions.

**2. Provide communication skills training for all employees.** By providing communication skills training, employees can increase their ability to communicate effectively with a diverse range of individuals, and manage the communica-

tion problems that are often at the heart of organizational conflict.

**3. Help staff develop positive work relationships.** Give employees a chance to get to know each other better, and to feel more comfortable with each other. This can be done by providing opportunities for social interaction on a continuous basis, by giving assignments that put staff into contact with individuals they don't normally interact with, and by providing cross-training opportunities.

**4. Implement teambuilding activities.** You can significantly improve team relationships and

## Managing Conflict: A 10 Step Program

performance through the team development process. Such activities provide an opportunity for team members to get more comfortable with each other, to identify acceptable behaviors and modes of interaction, and to determine, in advance, how team problems

and conflicts will be resolved.

**5. Develop strong communication channels.** You can improve the quality of communication within a team or organization by strategically employing informational and problem-solving meetings, and by utilizing a diverse range of organiza-

tional communication tools on a consistent basis. Such tools include face-to-face discussions, e-mail, videoconferences/electronic meetings, fliers, bulletin boards (both physical and electronic), voice mail and faxes.

COMMUNICATING IN CULTURALLY  
DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS

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## Managing Conflict: A 10 Step Program (continued)

6. **Create an environment that encourages participation.** This can be done through formal Employee Involvement Programs (EIP) such as self-directed work teams, and suggestion systems that solicit employee input and reward individuals for their participation. This is especially important because research has consistently shown that EIP have a positive impact on both individual and organizational performance.

7. **Provide conflict mediation training for leaders.** No matter how hard you work at reducing dysfunctional conflict (conflict that hinders performance and prevents you from achieving organizational goals), sooner or later it is going to occur. Therefore, organizational leaders should develop their conflict mediation skills so they can help employees resolve the conflicts that will inevitably arise.

8. **Provide 3rd party conflict mediation services that can be used by employees in a confidential manner.** There will be times when a manager or supervisor cannot mediate a conflict between employees. During these times, it helps if employees feel they have an experienced, objective third party where they can confidentially address issues with those they are in conflict with.

## Managing Conflict: A 10 Step Program (continued)

9. **Make sure employees are clear about organizational goals and priorities.** Generally speaking, conflicts occur because of differences over *facts*, *goals*, *methods* or *values*. By ensuring that employees (especially the members of a given work team) are 'on the same page' regarding objectives, priorities and plans, you will decrease the chances that dysfunctional conflict will occur due to differences over facts, goals or methods.

10. **Treat everyone fairly and equitably.** This may seem obvious, but many managers have been accused of preferential treatment, and it is incumbent upon individuals in leadership positions to examine their actions to ensure they are behaving in an egalitarian fashion. Even the appearance of preferential behavior can create conflict situations.

## Dr. Holmes' Upcoming Presentations and Publications

**Designing and Facilitating Performance Based Diversity Training** - A general session at the International Society for Performance Improvement's annual conference in Tampa, FL on April 21, 2004. Please visit the ISPI website for more information at [www.ispi.org](http://www.ispi.org).

**Leading Teams in the 21st Century** - A keynote presentation for the Michigan Assisted Living Association in Lansing, MI on May 4, 2004. Please contact Joanne Wiliford of MALA at (734) 525-2461 for more information.

**Designing and Facilitating Performance Based Diversity Training** - An article published in the Performance Improvement journal of the International Society for Performance Improvement, May/June 2004 issue.

