

CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Settings

5 Ways to Reduce Conflict

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Conflict is a fact of life! Whenever you have two or more individuals in close proximity working with limited resources, you have the potential for conflict. Fortunately, there are steps each of us can take to reduce the chance that conflict will occur. In previous issues of this newsletter, I described steps organizations can take to limit conflict (Managing Conflict: A 10 Step Program, April 2004), identified actions we can take to effectively resolve conflict (3 Steps to Conflict Resolution, October 2005), and described 3 common barriers to the conflict resolution process (3 Barriers to Conflict Resolution, July 2007). In this issue, I will discuss 5 steps each of us can take to reduce the conflict in our lives, and create more harmonious work environments:

1. **Develop positive relationships with all of your co-workers.** You should do this for at least two reasons. First, you are less likely to have a serious conflict with someone if you have a strong professional relationship. Second, in the event a conflict does occur, you can deal with it more effectively if you have a positive relationship with that person. Remember, for this to be effective you have to be proactive about developing positive relationships with ALL of your colleagues. Not just a select few. You do not have to be friends with all of your co-workers, but you should make an effort to develop a positive relationship with everyone you interact with on a regular basis.
2. **Get to know one of your colleagues.** As you read this newsletter, you

can probably think of a co-worker that you don't know very well. Develop a strategy to get to know that person better. Go out to lunch together, get together at break, have a conversation after a team meeting, or work on a project together. Whatever you do, make a sincere effort to develop a stronger relationship. This will really pay off during difficult times when stress is high and the potential for conflict increases.

3. **Deal with minor problems, issues and conflicts as soon as they arise.** One of the biggest reasons we have to deal with so many workplace conflicts is that we allow minor issues to linger and grow larger over time. Try to address minor problems immediately so they have no chance to spread.

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5 Ways to Reduce Conflict (continued)

4. **Identify your trigger points.** A trigger point is anything that ‘sets you off’ emotionally. It’s something that makes you angry, upset or sad. A colleague may do something that activates one of your trigger points, which can lead to a conflict or a problem. By understanding what ‘sets you off’, you can better manage your environment to avoid these trigger points. To do this, ask yourself two questions. First, “what sets me off?” These are referred to as *activating events* because they raise your emotional level. Second, determine “how can I reduce the chance that these activating events will occur?” Think about what you can do behaviorally to reduce the likelihood of their occurrence. Finally, consider what you will do when you encounter one of your activating events. Chances are, even if you do an excellent job of managing your environment, sooner or later, someone is going to ‘ruffle your feathers’. You should have a plan for how you will deal with these situations so you can keep your emotions in check.

5 Ways to Reduce Conflict (continued)

5. **Demonstrate the 3 C’s of Trust.** Always remember, **conflict does not prosper in trusting relationships**. Therefore, you should work to develop trust with your colleagues. Sometimes, this is easier said than done. However, you can engender trust by demonstrating *competence, care* and *consistency*. You can best demonstrate competence by performing high quality work and by doing what you say you will do. Few actions erode trust more quickly than going back on your word. You can demonstrate care by genuinely assisting and supporting others in their endeavors, and you can demonstrate consistency by being competent and showing care on a regular basis.

My Fitness Corner Blog

I have a new weblog entitled, **The Fitness Corner**. Through this blog, I provide you with specific tips, tools and resources you can use to lose weight, improve your health and fitness, and enhance your work-life balance. I cover a wide array of topics including:

- Developing a *Fitness Lifestyle*.
- Improving your eating habits.
- Losing weight **WITHOUT** dieting.
- Reducing stress in your life.
- Improving your work/life balance.
- Developing an exercise program.
- Exercising without exercise.
- And much more!

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About the Author

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