

# CONNECTIONS

*Communicating in Culturally Diverse Settings*

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## 5 More Ways to Reduce Conflict

Greetings, in the last issue of CONNECTIONS, I described 5 actions we can take to reduce dysfunctional conflict in the workplace. These actions include:

1. Develop positive relationships with all of your co-workers.
2. Get to know one of your colleagues.
3. Deal with minor problems, issues and conflicts as soon as they arise.
4. Identify your trigger points.
5. Demonstrate the 3 C's of Trust.

In this issue, I describe 5 more actions that will help you reduce conflict, improve relationships and create more harmonious work environments. As you read this, think about what you can do to begin applying these behaviors.

1. **Apply the two key elements of effective listening.** The first, and most obvious, is that listening involves understanding the message being sent by your communication partner in the way it is intended. The second, and frequently neglected aspect, is that effective listening involves the verbalization of your understanding to your communication partner. By consciously applying both elements, you will become a more effective listener. This will enable you to build stronger relationships and reduce the frequency of interpersonal conflict.

2. **Demonstrate empathy in all of your interactions.** Empathy is the ability to identify with and understand another person's feelings, situations, ideas, values and desires. There are many ways to

demonstrate empathy, but the best way is to listen before speaking, to try and understand where the other person is coming from, and to communicate your understanding on a consistent basis. This can go a long way toward reducing the conflict in your life, and helping you resolve the conflicts that do occur.

3. **Know yourself.** Develop a clear and accurate understanding of your communication style, conflict resolution style, work style preferences and biases, and how these impact your interactions with others. Many conflicts occur because of personal style differences between two or more individuals. For example, one person may want to work together in a group to accomplish a project, while another may want to work alone. Neither person is

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## 5 More Ways to Reduce Conflict (continued)

right or wrong in this scenario, but their style differences can create conflict within a group. By being aware of your style (i.e., how you like to do things), you have a better chance of understanding how your behavior may negatively impact others and what you can do to interact more effectively when challenged with style differences.

4. **Always be yourself.** Never feel like you must act in a particular way to make your co-workers feel more comfortable. Never behave based on what you think others expect of you. Conflict-free communication starts with honesty, and the most basic way to be honest with others is to be yourself at all times.

5. **Be accepting of differences.** Keep in mind that acceptance doesn't necessarily mean agreement. You can be totally accepting of a person while still disagreeing with their beliefs, style or approach to various tasks. Acceptance refers to a willingness to sup-

## 5 More Ways to Reduce Conflict (continued)

port and validate your colleagues, to have positive regard for them, and to remain non-judgmental even in circumstances where you do not agree. I have found that many conflicts can be avoided if we simply respect another person's right to be different; to have a different style or a different point of view. That does not make you wrong and the other person right. It simply acknowledges that there are diverse 'ways of being' and the more understanding we have about these differences, the more effective we will be at communicating in a diverse workplace. This, in turn, will allow us to deal with conflict more effectively.

## My New CONNECTIONS Blog!

I have a new diversity and multicultural communication blog entitled CONNECTIONS. Through this blog, I will provide you with specific tips, information, resources and tools that will allow you to communicate, resolve conflict and solve problems in culturally diverse settings. I cover a wide array of topics including:

- How to avoid offending others.
- How to improve organizational communication.
- The barriers to effective multicultural communication.
- Reducing bias and stereotyping.

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## About the Author

Dr. Tyrone A. Holmes, LPC, CPT is a speaker, trainer, consultant, fitness & cycling coach, author and competitive cyclist.

