

How to Turn a Conflict with Your Co-Worker into a Calm Conversation

Unless you only surround yourself with people who think, speak and work exactly like you (and how boring would *that* be?), you are going to come up against people who challenge your ideas--and who challenge you.

Disagreements can lead to diversity of thinking, improvements in products and services, and greater productivity. Disagreements can also lead to better working relationships, but only if everyone involved fights fair.

Here are three healthy conflict behaviors to look for so that you can say "thank you" when you see them.

1. Telling you directly.

When a colleague tells you directly that they're frustrated with you, seeing a situation differently from you, or otherwise feeling disgruntled, consider it a gift. If you know, you can do something about it (or make an informed decision not to do anything about it). If you don't know, you're in the dark.

Try saying this: "Thank you so much for telling me directly that you [didn't like my decision/felt disrespected by me in the meeting/wished I had consulted with you]. I appreciate you trusting me enough to share that feedback. Would you like to discuss it further?"

2. Using a respectful tone.

In the face of an interpersonal conflict, our brains register a threat in approximately 1/5 of a second. We immediately go into fight, flight or freeze mode, and it's easy to become snippy, short-tempered, sarcastic, surly - or even go silent. It's reacting rather than considering how to respond.

If your colleague is willing and able to stop their automatic reaction, and demonstrate emotionally intelligent self-management by speaking to you calmly and with care, thank them. It likely took some work to be able to do that, and some respect for you to be willing to do it.

3. Being curious.

Healthy communication navigates and balances between two practices: advocacy and inquiry. In a conflict, we tend to over-rely on advocacy--telling the other person what we think and "know", why we're right, and why they're clearly wrong. Inquiry tends to go out the door. We're often more

committed to getting our way than to getting new information that could sway us (or, heaven forbid, reveal that we were wrong).

A conflict doesn't have to hurt people's feelings or slow down productivity. In fact, a conflict where both people care about the relationship as much as the outcome can be a catalyst to interpersonal and organizational progress.