

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Conflict, Dispute Resolution and Dealing with Difficult People

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Objectives

- To understand what conflict is and when it is helpful versus harmful
- To understand what contributes to conflict and why it needs to be resolved
- To understand your approach to conflict
- To learn strategies for avoiding, de-escalating, and resolving conflict
- To learn how to deal with the high conflict individual
- To practice some skills for real-life situations

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What is Conflict? The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

- Conflict is a normal part of any relationship
- Conflict generally arises from differences or disagreements over values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires
- When handled appropriately and with respect, conflict can lead to a greater understanding and move parties toward mutually agreeable solutions
- When handled inappropriately, conflict can lead to resentment, anger, and even become toxic

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How Does Conflict Affect Us Personally?

- Physiologically
- Emotionally
- Intellectually



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When Conflict is Helpful?

- Conflict is natural and can even be a good resource
- Leads to issue identification– if an issue is not raised, it cannot be resolved
- It can help us discover underlying interests
- If handled well, it can lead to necessary discussion and solutions for moving forward

CONFLICT IS A GIFT,
ALTHOUGH IT'S WRAPPED BADLY



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When Conflict is Harmful?

- When conflict is more than just a disagreement and a real or perceived threat is not resolved
- When conflict is ignored and left to fester
- When conflict is handled with anger, explosive reactions (verbal or physical), or violence



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Where Did it All Go Wrong?

What are some examples of typical conflicts that can and do happen in our daily lives that get us off course and into conflict?



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How Does Conflict Affect our Group?

- Effectiveness
- Collaboration
- Relationships
- Cohesiveness



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What is Your Approach to Conflict?

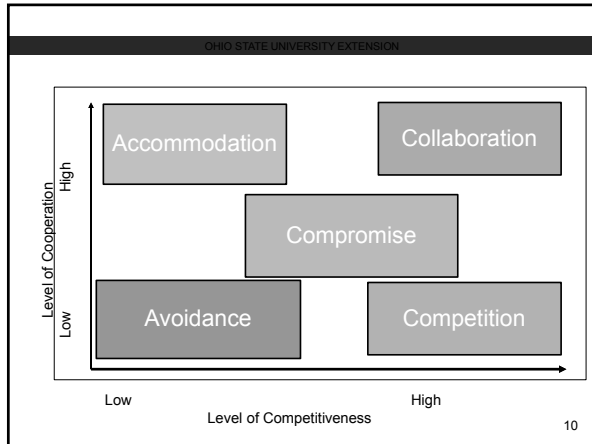
- Competing
- Accommodating
- Avoiding
- Collaboration
- Compromising



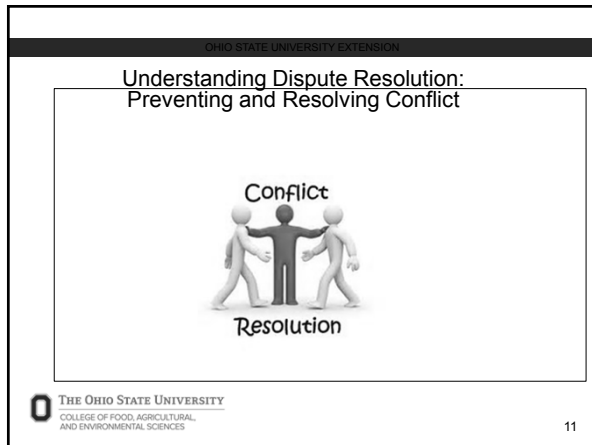
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- ### Strategies for Preventing Conflict
- Focus on the present and let go of the past
 - Pick your battles– know when to let something go
 - Be an active listener
 - Minimize misinterpretation– seek clarity
 - Pay attention to verbals and non-verbals
 - Constantly consider things from another's perspective
 - Agree to disagree
 - Recognize and manage your own emotions
 - Be willing to forgive or be the "adulter adult"
 - Avoid conflict generating language and behaviors

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Approaches to De-escalating Typical Conflict

- Respect People-- **Attack Problems**
- Focus on the issue or problem and NOT the individual
- Understand that you are not going to change the person (and sometimes the person is **YOU**)
- Make understanding a priority, rather than winning or being right (Seek first to understand, then to be understood)
- ALWAYS demonstrate respect for the person, even if you don't like what they are saying
- Make yourself non-threatening
- Listen to the other person's feelings (go beyond just words)
- Acknowledge and accept their emotions/feelings
- Be willing to share your emotions/feelings
- Use a calm voice and tone

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Approaches to De-escalating Typical Conflict

- Accept responsibility for your contribution and apologize for it
- Use humor to diffuse tension
- Paraphrase the issue (What I understand you to be saying is... Is that accurate?)
- Reframe the problem (cognitive restructuring)
- Use de-escalation language



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What Not to Do

- Do not attack a person-- focus on the behavior or issue
- Do not assume you are right
- Do not give conflicting messages (words versus actions)
- Do not overgeneralize ("You ALWAYS, you NEVER")
- Do not lower yourself to the level of those behaving badly
- Do not scream, shout, or strike at another



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Facilitation Skills

- Set guidelines for discussion
- Seek clarification of the issue
- Understand the complained about behaviors (CABs)
- Solicit the effects of the CABs
- Ensure each person gets their chance to do their "storytelling"
- Redirect parties to the issues and facts when they start to digress or attack
- Solicit possible solutions (brainstorming with no judging)
- Identify solutions to implement
- Evaluate success
- Call a timeout, if needed
- Set a time limit for "venting"




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Dealing with Difficult People: Mediating the Problematic Personality



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How to Handle the High Conflict Individual: Tools and Language for Working with REALLY Difficult People

- Understand the person's intentions—seek to understand their motivation
- Recognize that they are often trying to make the choice that seems the best from their perspective in the current moment
- Let the person know where you are coming from (they may think you are the difficult person)
- Look at the situation objectively
- Choose not to be an adversary
- Foster a connection or a common interest or goal
- Do not get dragged down
- Don't take it personally



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How to Handle the High Conflict Individual: Tools and Language for Working with REALLY Difficult People

- Turn the mirror on yourself– what might you be doing to contribute to the way this person is behaving?
- Recognize that you may be the difficult person's difficult person
- Do a little homework in advance
- Know your triggers and their triggers
- Be prepared with how you will respond
- Call out the specific behaviors that are a concern to you
- Spell out what you want to change
- State your needs clearly with assertive communication
- Stick to the facts
- Identify and assert consequences, if necessary
- Walk away if necessary
- Seek out professional assistance

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4 Quick Steps to Resolving Conflict

- Step #1: Raise the Issue
- Step #2: Discover the Underlying Interests
- Step #3: Invent Options for Mutual Gain
- Step #4: Develop Agreements Based on Objective



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Step #1: Raise the Issue

- To solve a problem, you need to know what the problem is.
- You need to focus on the problem and the **effects** of the issue or behavior.
- You need to remain calm and willing to listen to multiple perspectives.

Ask: Can you help me understand what you see as the problem and how that impacts you or others?

Language you can use:

- Tell me more.
- Help me understand.
- What are the effects of this?
- Can you clarify for me?
- How so?

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Step #2: Discover the Underlying Interests

- There is typically a conflict because there are underlying interests in defending positions... what are they?
- Ask clarifying questions to get at the interests.
- Ask them to articulate what they understand the issue to be and why they feel so strongly about it.
- Sometimes these are obvious... and sometimes you really need to be a detective.
- Ask yourself why you are affected by it and what your own interests might be.

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Step #3: Invent Options for Mutual Gain

- Provide time and a safe space for discussing options for resolving the issue.
- Do not attack ideas– promote discussion around the pros and cons
- Look for solutions that provide mutual gain

Language:

- Can you tell what you think would solve the problem?
- What are some possible options for us to consider?
- What is your understanding of my/our perspective?
- If I understand correctly, you would like me/us to ***? Is that right?
- How can we achieve ***, where your concerns about *** can be addressed and my concern regarding *** is taken into consideration?

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Step #4: Develop Agreements Based on Objective

- Decide which option(s) you would like to try and, if relevant, in which order.
- Write out what the agreed upon option is
- Provide any necessary detail for implementing option(s)
- Evaluate the success of the options (set a timeframe to revisit)

Consider bringing in a facilitator or mediator if you are unable to achieve resolution on your own.

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When conflict occurs:

Ask Questions:

How do you think that ____ went?

Use your four steps

- Discuss the issue/problem
- Discuss the underlying interests
- Invent options for mutual gains
- Develop agreements based in the Objective

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Try this when you anticipate there will be conflict:

Get ahead of it

Speak with those who will be at the event/meeting if it is reasonable to do so

Communicate the anticipated conflict and seek input to improve communication

Respect all view-points

Set meeting ground rules such as:

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Meeting Ground Rules I use:

WELCOME!
Our goal is to have a productive and enjoyable meeting. As a committee participant you can influence the success of the meeting.

- Openly contribute your ideas with enthusiasm
- Restrict discussion to the topic at hand
- Ask questions when you do not understand
- Avoid telling stories of individual cases unless it furthers the discussion
- Respect the views of other participants
- Be "present" for entire meeting
- Think critically and behave constructively
- Be aware that our time together is limited
- Avoid side conversations
- Inform your constituents and be informed by your constituents
- Consider the local, regional and state implications of our decisions
- Respond with "yes and" never "no but"

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Questions?

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