

Negotiating a Workplace Conflict

1. Let people tell their story. When people are deeply upset about something, they *need* to get their story out. Allowing people to speak their minds *can* increase the level of conflict with which you must deal. That's OK. You have to get through the conflict phase to find the solution. Sometimes, feeling that they have finally "been heard" can dramatically change an angry person's outlook.

2. Bring a reality check to the table. Often in a conflict, people lose sight of the big picture and its implications. In such cases, bring people back to reality by steering their attention away from the small stuff and focus on the big picture. Keep the end goal in mind.

3. Identify the true impediment. In every conflict, ask yourself: "*What is the true motivating factor here? What is really keeping this person from agreeing to a solution?*"

When you can identify the reason for the objection then you can predict how the person will respond to certain ideas and you can shape negotiations accordingly.

4. Learn to "read minds." Mind-reading is a combination of observation and intuition. You can learn a lot about how each party sees a dispute by paying attention to body language and listening closely not only to their words but also to the emotional tone behind their words.

5. Think creatively about ways people can cooperate rather than clash. In every negotiation, there is a tension between the desire to compete and the desire to cooperate. Be on the lookout for signals that support a cooperative environment. That's where the most creative solutions can happen.

6. "Edit the script" to help people see their situation in a different light. People tend to get stuck in their positions because they're telling what happened from a narrow viewpoint and in a negative and hopeless tone. They *can't* see the situation any other way unless you help them to do so. You can take a larger view that looks not at one party or the other "winning" but at both parties working toward a mutual goal. One way to do that is to *edit their script*. Retell their story about the dispute in a positive, forward-looking construction. In that way, you literally give them the words to see their options in a new light.

7. Realize that every conflict can't be solved. Not every negotiation will have a win/win outcome. Not everyone can live together in harmony. There are times when you just have to accept that both parties may leave the table equally unhappy. Isolate the participants if possible, and urge them to continue on the best they can. Best solution here is to keep the respect for one another even if you can't part as friends.