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4 Ways Leaders Effectively Manage Employee Conflict



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Leadership Strategy

Leadership in the Age of Personalization

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Conflict resolution is a daily occurrence at work that can either propel or disrupt the momentum for a leader, a team or the entire organization. The workplace can become a toxic environment when leaders allow conflict to fester rather than confront it head-on. Managing conflict can be a tricky thing – especially when you are not familiar with the larger ecosystem in which the particular individual or department creating the conflict operates, and how efforts to resolve conflict will reverberate throughout that ecosystem. The workplace is **fueled with so many concurrent agendas** that you never know which ones may be affected when you resolve conflict solely to benefit and advance your own.

Leaders must act responsibly to be respected. Leadership is not a popularity contest; it is a serious responsibility that primarily **involves developing and guiding the full potential in people**, teams and the organization at-large. An important part in the process of developing potential is knowing how to see conflict and when to seize the opportunity within the conflict before healthy tension turns into overly disruptive chaos.



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Many leaders would rather avoid tension to create the appearance of harmony. What they don't realize is that by avoiding tension all together they are unknowingly creating silos and internal disruption amongst employees. A leader must be expected to neutralize or minimize conflict, not allow it to grow and run rampant.

Unfortunately, in their attempts to keep the peace at work, leaders often create artificial, [untrustworthy environments](#). This is what happens when you are more concerned about being well-liked, avoiding a negative reputation, or being put into a situation that might reveal your leadership vulnerabilities.

As I learned, there are some people you can work through conflict with and others that are too proud, too afraid to be vulnerable, or just too overwhelmed by their own insecurities to acknowledge the tension – let alone work through it. [To help you create and sustain workplace momentum](#), employee engagement, and healthy outcomes, here are four ways to deal with conflict resolution at work.

1. Right Timing

People often create unnecessary conflict. Leaders who avoid conflict at all cost will find themselves regretting it later. Timing is everything when it

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If everyone around you knows it must be dealt with and you are still waiting to act, you are losing the respect of your peers and those you lead.

Leadership is about taking action and confronting the issues before it's too late. If you wait too long during times of adversity, those around you will begin to make the decisions that you were hesitant to make – and you lose momentum as a leader. When others see that you are not mature enough as a leader to act, [this puts your leadership reputation at risk](#).

How you deal with adversity may make or break you, but more than anything it will ultimately reveal you. Take the [Workplace Serendipity Quiz](#) to identify your ability to see potential conflict and identify the opportunity within it.

2. Know Your Boundaries

Conflict can become something much more complicated and unmanageable if you don't know the limitations and boundaries of your employees.

Everyone deals with conflict differently, so you must know the risks and rewards of conflict resolution within the boundaries of each of your employees.

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This can be accomplished with consistent coaching sessions where you can begin to set precedence and reinforce performance expectations for each of your employees. This not only allows you to identify their conflict boundaries but more importantly to establish standards that will help prevent conflict from arising.

Leaders who actively engage in coaching and learning about those on his/her team will find themselves dealing with much less conflict. The new workplace represents a growing diversity in the types of people that we lead; you must get to know who they are if you want to understand how they will influence the ecosystem you are trying to create.

3. Respect Differences

Rather than impose your influence, hierarchy or rank – respect the unique differences in people and learn to see things from differing points of view so you can better understand how to avoid conflict in the future. Conflict resolution is rarely black and white. In fact, there are more and more grey areas these days as the workplace becomes more generationally and culturally diverse than ever before.

Beyond the understanding of how conflict could have been avoided, respecting differences in people can help you better understand how to manage conflict with people in general (and their boundaries as noted in point two).

Common sense tells us that we are most comfortable dealing with those we trust and naturally gravitate towards. As leaders, we must see that each employee represents a unique opportunity for professional growth and development. Let's face it, **business is all about people intelligence**, and until we accept this fact we will continue to **unknowingly create tension**

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4. Confront the Tension

Leadership is often about doing the things that most other people don't like doing. Conflict resolution is one of those things – but as leaders we must confront the tension head-on. Don't wait, but rather activate your leadership to address the conflict before circumstances force your hand.

Conflict can yield an emotional state of mind that makes it more difficult to manage it. As such, we must confront rather than allow it to fester because we failed to address the adversity when it first became apparent. Adversity is very big when it is all you can see. But it is very small when in the presence of all else that surrounds you.

Perception is not always reality and oftentimes we don't confront the most obvious situation before us because we let other points of view distort what we believe to be true. The most effective leaders have the self-awareness and wisdom to confront and diffuse the tension. Conflict resolution is much like any other form of adversity. You either act or you don't. How many times has your gut told you to take action when dealt with adversity, but instead you waited until those around you took the calculated risks that you were hesitant to take yourself?

Leadership is about anticipating the unexpected. **Don't complicate matters.** Trust yourself enough to take action.

Conflict resolution is about seeing opportunities that others don't see. When dealing with conflict resolution through a lens of opportunity, conflict can be a healthy enabler of growth for your business –and professional growth for all of the people involved. Effective leaders know that the most authentic relationships with their employees, clients and external partners don't truly begin until they experience some form of tension with them

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embraced and dealt with – not just to resolve a possible problem or to detect an opportunity – but as a moment to learn about your own leadership maturity as you lead others through adverse circumstances.

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