Conflict Resolution Training for Supervisors
“Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.” –William James

This training focuses on ways supervisors can work with their employees to resolve conflict in the workplace. It provides practical steps and techniques that everyone can learn.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide supervisors with the knowledge to recognize causes of workplace conflict, how to facilitate resolution of conflict and how to manage the work relationships once the conflict has been resolved.

This sample presentation is intended for presentation to supervisors and other individuals who manage employees that must be customized to include and match your own policies and practices. It is designed to be presented by an individual who is knowledgeable in both employee relations and managing conflict in the workplace.
At the close of this session, you will be able to:
1. Cite the causes of workplace conflict.
2. State why it is important to resolve conflict in the workplace.
3. Describe the methods of resolving conflict.
4. List the Do’s and Don’ts of workplace conflict.
5. Describe the steps in the conflict resolution process.
Conflict is any situation in which your concerns or desires differ from those of another person*.

• Some examples of workplace conflict are:
  • Disagreement between employees.
  • Employees who just don’t get along (there isn’t an apparent conflict).

* (From Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument)
Causes of Conflict (cont’d)

- **Conflict arises because employees:**
  > Have different points of view.
  > Communicate to one another differently.
  > Spend large amounts of time together.
  > Depend on one another to “get the job done”.
  > Established expectations of one another are not communicated and then not met.
Conflict does not always have to be negative. When employees are able to challenge one another’s ideas in a supportive environment, new ideas are generated and fostered.

It is important to remember that conflict will always exist between employees. Effective supervisors have the skills to manage the conflict process and turn disagreements into ideas.
Causes of Conflict (cont’d)

Examples of Healthy vs. Damaging Conflict

Healthy Conflict
• Disagreements that are communicated in a supportive environment that foster the generation of new ideas or ways to problem solve.
• Tension that increases awareness or sheds light on a growing workplace problem.

Damaging Conflict
• Name Calling.
• Personal Attacks.
• Silent and Withdrawn, afraid to speak up
• Cliques, gossip and rumors.
• Lack of Mutual Respect.
Importance of Resolving Conflict

Why should we get involved? It’s their problem, right?

WRONG! Managers must learn to manage conflicts amongst their team members so that the business continues to run effectively and objectives are met.
Consequences of Letting Conflict Fester

• Employees not involved in the conflict either “pile on” or withdraw from the conflict.
  > This requires employees to take sides or “check out” from work entirely.
  > Morale and productivity is lowered because employees are focused on the conflict.
  > Employees who work in teams are now divided because of the conflict.
Consequences of Letting Conflict Fester (continued)

- In extreme instances, unresolved conflict can lead to violent or aggressive situations.
  - Potential for employees to become injured.
  - The company may have legal risks associated with violent situations in the workplace.
  - Work will slow dramatically or can halt altogether.
There are 5 basic ways of handling conflict in the workplace:

1. Competing
2. Collaborating
3. Compromising
4. Avoiding
5. Accommodating

It is important to note that there is **no one way** to resolve a conflict and often managers will need to utilize multiple methods in order to reach a resolution.

*(From Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument)*
Competing
The Competing Method involves handling the conflict through unilateral decision making. This is most appropriately used by managers and leaders in the workplace.

The Competing Method is used primarily for:
• Situations that involve quick action.
• Instances where there is no compromise or debate.
• Making hard or unpopular decisions.
Collaborating

The Collaborating Method involves handling the conflict through team input. This means of handling conflict is particularly useful if all parties in the conflict want to find a resolution, but are unable to agree on what the resolution should be.

The Collaborating Method is used primarily for:

- Gaining support from the team.
- Using the different perspectives as an opportunity to learn.
- Improving relationships through collaboration.
Compromising

The Compromising Method involves handling the conflict by reaching a resolution that involves a “win” on both sides of the table.

The Compromising Method is used primarily for:

- Resolving issues of moderate to high importance.
- Finding a solution that involves equal power and strong commitment on both sides.
- Situations where a temporary fix may be needed.
- Backing up a decision that’s been made using the competing or collaboration methods.
Avoiding

The Avoiding Method is a way of handling conflict by making an active decision to not handle the conflict. This is best used for situations that are not work related and should be solved through another means.

The Avoiding Method is used primarily for:

- Unimportant or non-work related issues.
- Buying time until a resolution can be reached.
- Recognizing issues as symptoms.
Accommodating
The Accommodating Method is a way of handling conflict by allowing the other side to “win.”

The Accommodating Method is used primarily for:
• Maintaining perspective in a conflict situation.
• Making active decisions on what can be “let go” vs. what needs another method.
• Keeping the peace and creating goodwill.
Do’s and Don’ts of Resolving Conflict

Do…

- Understand that conflicts are inevitable.
- Resolve to address conflict quickly.
- Focus on the problem.
- Be open to solutions.
- Acknowledge how employees are feeling.
- Listen actively.
Do’s and Don’ts of Resolving Conflict (cont’d)

Don’t…

> Focus on personality traits that cannot be changed.
> Interrupt.
> Attack.
> Disregard the feelings of the employees.
> Avoid the conflict.
> Allow emotions to take over the conversation.
> Impose personal values or beliefs.
Steps In The Conflict Resolution Process

There are six steps to the Conflict Resolution Process:
1. Clarify what the disagreement is.
2. Establish a common goal for both parties.
3. Discuss ways to meet the common goal.
4. Determine the barriers to the common goal.
5. Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict.
6. Acknowledge the agreed solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution.

This process should be completed by all parties in the conflict together.

(“Conflict Resolution Skills for HR Professionals” by Marla Bradley)
Clarify what the disagreement is
Clarifying involves getting to the heart of the conflict. The goal of this step is to get both sides to agree on what the disagreement is.

Tips:
• Discuss what needs are not being met on both sides of the conflict. Ensure mutual understanding.
• Obtain as much information as possible on each side’s point of view.
• Continue to ask questions until you are certain that you, and each side of the conflict understand the issue.
Establish a common goal for both parties

In this step of the process, both sides agree on the desired outcome of the conflict.

Tips:
- Discuss what each party would like to see happen.
- Find a commonality in both sides as a starting point for a shared outcome. That commonality can be as simple as “both sides want to end the conflict.”
The Steps In The Conflict Resolution Process (cont’d)

Discuss ways to meet the common goal
Both sides work together to discuss ways that they can meet the goal they agreed upon in step 2.

Tips:
• Brainstorm different approaches to meet the goal.
• Discuss until all the options are exhausted.
**Determine the barriers to the common goal**
In this step of the process, the two parties acknowledge what has brought them into the conflict.

**Tips:**
- Ask: “If we could have the outcome that we both wanted, how would that look?”
- Define what can and cannot be changed about the situation.
- For the items that cannot be changed, discuss ways of getting around those road blocks.
Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict
Both parties come to a conclusion on the best resolution.

Tips:
• Determine a solution that both sides can live with.
• Discuss the responsibility each party has in maintaining the solution.
• Settle on a means of ensuring that this conflict does not arise again.
Acknowledge the agreed solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution
Both sides own their responsibility in the resolution of the conflict and express aloud what they have agreed to.

Tips:
• Get both parties to acknowledge a win-win situation.
• Ask both parties to use phrases such as “I agree to…” and “I acknowledge that I have responsibility for…”
• Conflict is inevitable in the workplace. There is healthy and damaging conflict

• Some causes of workplace conflict are:
  > Employees with different points of view.
  > Employees who communicate differently.
  > Spending large amounts of time together.

• It is important to address conflict because unresolved conflict leads to low morale, productivity, and in extreme cases, workplace violence.
• The 5 methods of resolving conflict are:
  1. Competing
  2. Collaborating
  3. Compromising
  4. Avoiding
  5. Accommodating

• The 6 steps in the conflict resolution process are:
  1. Clarify what the disagreement is.
  2. Establish a common goal for both parties.
  3. Discuss ways to meet the common goal.
  4. Determine the barriers to the common goal.
  5. Agree on the best way to resolve the conflict.
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