

Managing Conflict

We like to circulate this content every year because relationship conflict is something that we all encounter, both at home and at work. Life is filled with difficult people – family members, friends, coworkers, or supervisors who seem to thrive on conflict. They provide opinions – often fraught with negativity, do not appreciate constructive feedback and become defensive easily. These frustrating folks can sap your energy and motivation, and even cause you to doubt your own competency. No one wants to work in this type of environment!

Navigating interpersonal conflict is an art form. It takes *a lot* of self-awareness and self-control, and even the most socially astute, emotionally intelligent person will come up short at times. Learning to manage difficult people and situations takes practice, but it starts with de-escalation and focusing on collaborative problem solving. Give the following a try:



- **Keep cool.** We tend to mirror the emotions others throw our way. When frustrated or feeling defensive, it's easy to lash out and participate in the escalation of volatile emotions... which further impairs our ability to solve anything! Try to take a few deep breaths, remind yourself to stay calm, and resist the urge to respond in-kind.

- **Reflect & Restate.** Often when others are angry, they actually just want to know that they're heard and understood. Instead of responding to criticism defensively, try to calmly and concisely summarize what the other person says, letting them know you recognize the cause of their frustration; also try refocusing on the way forward: "I understand you're upset about how I _____. How can we keep this from being an issue in the future?"

- **Acknowledge the sentiment(s) behind the words.** Similar to the "I feel _____, when _____" statements, try to empathize with how the other person feels about the situation. Was trust broken? Were expectations not achieved? Were others' perceptions a key issue? By pointing out the underlying concern, you refocus discussion on the true problem at hand.

- **Ask for specific feedback.** "Do better" doesn't help anyone. Ask for specific, behavioral recommendations for how to change or manage things in the future. Even better, make it a *shared responsibility* so that the impetus for change doesn't fall on you, alone! When *we* approach a problem, everyone becomes invested as part of a team, and that's how we all win.