

# Focusing on Constructive Conflict

*Conflict is an essential aspect of our professional and personal lives. On a daily basis, our interactions with others through conflict can inspire growth and the development of new ideas. The key to healthy conflict is not resolution, but rather management.*



**No** MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY, conflict is an inescapable fact of life. There will always be disagreements and arguments. Although these instances may temporarily be unpleasant, the long-term effects of conflict can be positive when managed properly.

"Conflict resolution is somewhat of a misnomer," explains Jim Oher, Business Coach and Facilitator for Oher and Associates. "We are continually surrounded by conflict and it never truly goes away. In order for conflict to be productive, however, it must be managed in a manner that inspires moving forward, teamwork, and greater understanding."

In the business world, companies function with one goal in mind—to achieve success. At the core of business, both internally and externally, is continual conflict. From disagreements between coworkers to competition between companies, the business world is a breeding ground for disagreements. For employees to remain content and productive, a delicate balance must be maintained.

## REPRESSION AND EMPOWERMENT

In an office setting, the key to promoting positive conflict management is giving employees the opportunity to air thoughts and feelings. By allowing employees to share their thoughts constructively, innovation and new products or services can be brainstormed, and colleagues can learn and be inspired by others. When workers feel they are being repressed, however, creative energies can be redirected into subversive and undermining activities.

"When business leaders choose to lead by fear, the practice can work for a short period of time," adds Oher. "In the long run, however, this management style will cause employees to keep their criticisms and ideas under wraps, potentially leading to widespread unhappiness and dissension."

Utilizing different management styles can have a tremendous impact on office morale and the work done by employees. The key to promoting a positive environment lies in taking the time to speak and interact with coworkers.

## INQUIRING MINDS

The foundation of successful conflict management lies in inquiry. A person's ability to genuinely be interested in others, ask questions, and seek clarification is invaluable in terms of overcoming office workflow and interpersonal issues.

"One key issue I notice with a lot of my clients is a lack of inquiry," explains Oher. "When managers do not ask workers to clarify or simply don't ask any questions at all, the opportunity for conflict can be magnified. By asking questions and seeking greater insight, managers can manage conflict and seek out ways to enhance or improve business processes."

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