



Screaming Employees? How to effectively resolve conflicts in the workplace

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Do you have employees that are out and out fighting with each other at work? Yelling, screaming, not getting along or perhaps has difficult relationships with their supervisor?

Conflicts in the workplace happen frequently and the fallout can be costly to the employer and the employee. Developing the skills to resolve conflicts that arise can save your company significant money.

First let's look at the costs:

1. Decreased productivity due to the emotions involved in interpersonal conflict.
2. time lost from work by employees
3. time lost from work by managers involved in the conflict
4. recruitment and training of new employees
5. decreased productivity by other staff due to tension/stress and the overall work environment

The root of many conflicts is communication: either unclear communication, resulting in misunderstandings. One strategy to address rising incidents of conflict is communication training. Teaching people how to listen and how to talk clearly can prevent and decrease conflicts. Communication is such a challenge. So often, we feel we have been really clear, only to find out that the other person really misunderstood us. Being a clear communicator takes commitment. You need to be able to talk in a neutral sort of way, eliminating inflammatory emotions. Speak from the heart and listen from the heart are good basic guidelines. Beyond the basics, are to listen deeply to what the other person is saying and then to check-in with them. Ask them: "is this what you are saying?" It lets the person you are talking with know what you have understood and gives them the opportunity to clarify or correct misunderstandings.

What do you do when the conflicts have escalated? Resolving conflicts are good for everyone involved, but sometimes it's hard to see that in the moment for the people directly in conflict. As mentioned earlier,

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conflict is costly. Sometimes as the owner, or manager we forget that there is a great cost to us but also to the employee. Changing jobs due to a conflict means a great deal of change for an employee. They might not be able to get the same level of pay; benefits; shifts, etc that they are accustomed to. The impact to the employee and their family can be high.

As the leader you can set-up an effective environment to resolve the dispute by following some simple steps and laying out a couple of guidelines.

First, spend time talking with each person involved. Let them know that your belief is that developing a shared solution is important to each person and that you value each of the employees involved. During the individual meetings you can begin to gather information about what they see as the possible solutions. Let the employees know that your intent is to meet with each of them and then with them together, to talk about their perspective and possible solutions to the conflict.

Use a simple & effective process:

- 1. Create a safe space** for involved parties to talk. (private, neutral)
- 2. Set out the guidelines:**
 - ✳ Only one person talks at a time
 - ✳ No interruptions, defending or justifying
 - ✳ Come in with an open mind, open to the possible solutions and be willing to compromise.
- 3. Give each person an opportunity to tell their story, from their perspective.** Remind the other people involved that we are each listening, listening to each person's perspective. This is a key.
- 4. Paraphrase the stories of each person.** This ensures that each story has been understood. Using phrases such as "What I am hearing you say is.... Is that right?"
- 5. After everyone has had an opportunity to tell their story, brainstorm possible solutions.** Again, this isn't a time to judge. Whenever you are brainstorming you want all the ideas,

good or bad, or out in left field. One of them might be the idea that helps someone come up with the BEST solution.

6. Identify the solutions that work for each party. It's important that the solution is agreeable to each party and the company. In order for the agreed upon solution to work and be successful, you need buy in.

7. Agree to do the solution. The last step is the key to moving forward.

Some common pitfalls:

- ✳ Don't take sides. As the manager your interest is the company, the resolution of the conflict and each employee.
- ✳ Don't mandate a solution; you want the staff invested in the solution.

What do you do if staffs refuse to participate in conflict resolution?

Offering staffs the opportunity to resolve conflict is a much better option than being disciplined, having supervisor mandated solutions or taking no action at all. When staffs refuse to cooperate or participate, it's time to talk with them about your company policies, their personal responsibility for their behavior and actions and your responsibility as the owner or manager to take actions based on their behavior. The intent of this type of conversation isn't to threaten disciplinary action, but to talk about the reality of the situation and the need to resolve it. Each individual makes choices, as supervisors our actions are based upon the behaviors and actions of the employee. As the supervisor you are encouraging good choice making, but the reality is that some people will make a poor choice and choose to continue to act in ways that are not acceptable in your workplace. In these situations you must then follow your organizations policies as outlined for your employees in the employee handbook. Resolving the conflict and creating a good work environment for everyone is my first choice as the manager/supervisor/owner.

Conflicts in the workplace can be successfully resolved, by listening. Giving each person space to tell their story validates them and communicates to them their value to you and the organization. Using the simple process outlined keeps you moving in a positive direction.

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