



Deescalating Conflict

Conflict arises when someone challenges a belief you have or prevents you from doing what you think is right. In other words, conflict most often happens when someone challenges your sense of self-worth and how you perceive and receive information. This can take on many forms, for example, when someone's need for information or time to process information holds you back from moving forward, this can create conflict, or when what someone says or does challenges your self-worth, conflict arises.

Conflict does not have to be a bad thing, rather conflict can be an amazing asset to an organization or a relationship. As people, we have lenses which we filter all information through. These lenses are made up of our past experiences, our culture, our ethnicity, our strengths, and our motivations. We interpret information based on how we filter it. This is how our perception is created. It is in the interpretation stage where conflict is most likely to occur.

There are typically three stages to conflict. If you think of them as a kettle boiling water, stage one is when steam begins to rise, there is still time to move the kettle off the stove before it begins to whistle. Stage two is when you can hear the water boiling and the kettle is just starting to whistle. Stage three is when the kettle is whistling. Once the kettle begins to whistle, there is nothing you can do to stop it. The same can be said for conflict. If we can catch conflict in stage one, we can turn conflict into a positive interaction. We can use the difference in perceptions to learn more about ourselves and other people. Once you venture into stage two and three conflict must be managed.

When facing conflict, the most important thing to remember is that no one can force you to respond or make you react. Sometimes, the best route is to not say anything at all, or to not respond or engage with the other person. If you can stay calm enough to attempt to defuse the conflict through a positive strategy such as active listening, you should most definitely take this approach. Other times, the best approach is to clearly state both people involved have strong opinions, and both should be heard. Encourage taking a break to calm down so the needed conversation can take place.



As a leader, if you do not manage conflict, if you allow your employees to engage in conflict, you will be encouraging a toxic work environment. Conflict must be handled in as calm and efficient a manner as possible.