

Career Headlines

Monday, March 9, 2015

Managing Your Conflicts

All of us will face conflict at work at some point. How you cope with a situation has a great deal to do with the outcome. You can overcome conflict by applying these good coping strategies:

- **Avoidance or withdrawal.** This is useful when a situation is trivial, or when you don't care about the outcome. For example, you may not care what paper color a report is printed on, so why get involved in a color debate?
- **Accommodation.** With this approach, you put aside your current goal in order to accommodate the other person. Use this method when:
 - (1) *You realize another person's goal is more important than yours.* Example: Recognizing that satisfying a customer quickly is worth your personal time.
 - (2) *You value your relationship with a person more than the result you want.* Example: Agreeing with a coworker even though you like your idea better.
 - (3) *You decide that being agreeable now will help you achieve something else you want later.* Example: Working overtime means you can take Friday off.
- **Compromise.** With compromise, each person gives up some part of a goal. Neither is entirely satisfied, nor terribly unhappy. For example, you agree to help a coworker briefly, but can't give as much time as needed.
- **Competition.** With competition, you try to force others to go along with you. It's usually a "win-lose" situation, but competition can be important when you know you are right and are required to act quickly.
- **Collaboration.** Both parties find a mutually acceptable solution when they collaborate. It's the strategy that leads to constructive, not destructive, conflict—a "win-win." For example, you and a coworker switch tasks because each of you can perform more effectively by doing so.



Here are five things you should not do:

1. Pretend conflict doesn't exist
2. Keep secret the things you're planning to do that others won't like
3. Set up too many preconditions for resolving a problem
4. Whisper nasty things behind your opponent's back
5. Call in sick if you don't want to handle conflict at work

Action: Think back to a conflict you've had. Which of the approaches did you take? How did the conflict work out? What approach should you have taken?

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