

Tips for Managing Conflict

By Debra Hamilton

Wherever people gather and interact there will be differences of opinion, miscommunication, disputes, and heated arguments. It's a normal part of human functioning. And especially around the holidays, stress and tension can run very high, making us more prone to confrontations and clashes. While some of us shy away from conflict (a timid response), others fight their way through it (an aggressive response).

When we perceive a significant threat to us, our bodies get ready either for a fight or a desperate flight from defeat. For example, if you are faced with a sharp-toothed beast, you have two choices: wrestle it or run like heck.

During an encounter with conflict, we often experience physical symptoms: hair stands on end, heart rate increases, palms become sweaty, face turns red, pupils dilate, sweat glands open. Our anxious emotional state causes us to lose our natural judgment. Thinking becomes a hindrance. Just as when faced with the sharp-toothed beast, our brain tells us that hesitation could very well equal death.

Conflict does not have to result in fight or flight. And it doesn't have to be viewed negatively. In fact, people who possess conflict handling skills are able to view conflict as a positive opportunity to resolve issues rather than letting them fester into bigger problems.

Here are quick tips for managing conflict.

1. **Avoid being defensive.** Avoid attacking or playing the victim. Control your emotions from the beginning of the confrontation.
2. **Use open and honest communication.** Seek to understand the other person first. Talk about the facts and use specific language to clarify the issue.
3. **Listen with empathy.** Listen to the other person's feelings and paraphrase those feelings to show that you understand their position. Say, "I understand your frustration with ..."
4. **Use questions to clarify.** When it's not clear what the other person wants, ask open-ended questions to better understand the real problems and concerns. Say, "Tell me more about that."
5. **Avoid using *always* and *never*.** Use specific and factual language to put the problem on the table. In general, *always* and *never* are inflammatory words that distort and exaggerate an issue.

6. **Stick to the current issue.** Bringing up annoyances from the past diverts from the conflict, confuses the issue, and prevents finding a solution for the existing problem.

7. **Stay flexible.** Consider alternative solutions. Say, “You want ABC and I want XYZ. How can we do both?” Developing multiple right answers increases your chances of finding a win-win outcome.

8. **Use humor.** Humor defuses tension and can help bring about an amicable resolution.

About Change Management Consulting, Inc. (CMC)

Founded in 1993, Change Management Consulting is a global management consulting and training company, dedicated to helping organizations of all sizes improve performance, achieve goals and advance leadership capability. As a full-service organizational improvement firm, CMC focuses on organizational and leadership development, compliance management (ISO 9001 and its derivatives), strategic planning and Lean Six Sigma initiatives.

Headquartered in Wayne, NJ with offices in San Diego, Dallas and Detroit, CMC has a proven track record in helping public and private sector clients implement pragmatic continual improvement initiatives that drive financially measurable results. CMC also has extensive experience in obtaining grants and funding assistance for its clients. Learn more at www.cmc-changemanagement.com or contact CMC at (877) 268-2440 or (973) 696-7878.