



## Ways to Handle Conflict Management

by Julie Silvester

“He did it again. Bob just can’t resist taking credit for ideas he doesn’t think of.” Sound familiar? Since the time of Adam and Eve to the present day Bob’s of the world, people have been working together and dealing with conflict.

A few factors make conflict in the workplace unique. First, the hierarchical structure in most workplace situations makes job security a motivating factor. Those in authority have the power to make your job life difficult or even eliminate it. Second, the fast pace of today’s business world makes relationship issues low priority. Relationships take time, which is why it is often easier, and expected to just keep production levels high. Finally, the workplace is more diverse than ever before. Diversity strengthens the workplace, but understanding the gender and cultural differences can be time consuming and challenging.

So how can you handle conflict in today’s workplace? Here are a few principles to get you started.

### **BELIEVE THE BEST**

In conflict situations it is easy to think you know the motive of another person. Unless you are a mind reader, you cannot know for sure what is motivating another person. Check to see if you are not assuming the worst in the other person instead of believing the best.

### **WAIT FIVE MINUTES**

It’s a good idea to wait a few minutes to respond if you are unsure what someone meant by a comment or if you feel offended. Often what comes out of our mouth when we are hurt or feel misunderstood only makes matters worse. Take a few minutes and then go back to address things with your co-worker.

### **LISTEN AND REPEAT**

Don’t assume you understand. If you are not sure what someone means either directly or indirectly try saying, “Could you repeat that, I’m not sure what you are saying.” That gives them a chance to restate the comment or rescind it all together.

### **GO TO THE SOURCE**

Nothing could be less professional than office gossip. If you have a problem with someone have the guts to go to them directly. Don’t settle for the easy out by venting to someone who can’t do anything about it.

### **SANDWICH COMMENTS**

Psychologist and author, Dr. Henry Cloud, talks about the good/bad split which acknowledges that no one is all good or all bad. When approaching a difficult



confrontation be sure to start with a positive (something you appreciate about the person), then bring up the central issue and finish with another positive or repeat your appreciation for that person.

## **AVOID ALWAYS AND NEVER**

Using extreme words can put people on the defense. While these words communicate what you are feeling, often such words are exaggerations and can complicate communication.

Whatever your workplace situation, if there are people there will be conflict. Expect it and have a plan for dealing with it. A book of ancient wisdom says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Choose your words carefully and you will experience improved communication and less conflict.