

Tasha's Leadership Tips: Handling Conflict Like a Pro

In the workplace, conflict is a way of life. And it has real consequences if not properly addressed. One study found that conflict accounts for 65 percent of voluntary resignations. Conflict happens when we perceive a threat to our security or well-being.

Each of us has a preferred reaction to conflict. Some give in, others run away, others still find a compromise, and some assume a winner-takes-all approach. Depending on the situation, each of these approaches might be perfectly appropriate. However, when the outcome of the conflict and your relationship with the other person are important, adopt a "win-win" mindset where both sides can have a positive outcome. Here are a few ways to do that.

Tips to Handle Conflict Like a Pro

 **Focus on Yourself First.** Ask, "What do I want for myself?" "What do I want for the other person?" "What do I want for our relationship?" "How would I behave if this were really what I wanted?" Honest reflection will often surface contradictory goals and behaviors (for example, your relationship with your coworker might be important to you, but in the heat of the moment, you told her you never wanted to speak to her again). Imagine you are viewing your actions as a spectator. Are you behaving insensitively? Are you forcing your idea? Are you really listening?

 **Have a Conversation:** Open the discussion by acknowledging the conflict. Say "Thanks for meeting with me. I know that our situation has been difficult for both of us. I value our relationship and want to find a resolution." Then establish a good reason to resolve the conflict. For example, "Wouldn't it be so much easier for us to work on our project if we could figure out a way to get along?" Next, obtain agreement from the person that you will both work to find a solution. Especially if you are after a win-win agreement, Ask: "Can we agree to keep talking about this issue until we can find a solution we're both happy with?"

 **Manage Your Emotions:** If the issue is important and there is disagreement, you can expect some emotion. It is essential that you remain calm, especially if the other person is not. Research shows that our emotions actually "rub off" on others: if you appear calm, you will deescalate things, and it might help the other person calm down. If you feel triggered, don't say anything. Buy yourself some time. Ideas: Ask a clarifying question. Count to ten. Excuse yourself from the room. The mere act of buying yourself some time can decrease your fight or flight response, and allow you to more rationally think what to do next.

 **Reframe your story:** Focus your effort on fully understanding the other person's position. When in doubt, ask a question rather than making a statement. Above all, instead of telling yourself a story that you are being targeted or persecuted or blamed, reframe the story you tell yourself. For example, instead of being a dismissal of your idea, perhaps someone asking questions is genuinely interested. If you are attacked, rephrase the comment to relate to the conflict. Example: if you hear "You never listen to me!" You respond with: "It sounds like there are some communication barriers between us." To further diffuse emotions, let the other person vent while you nod, truly listen, and question, until they run out of steam. Then continue the conversation until you reach agreement. If you can't do it in one sitting, make a plan and a timeline to resolve it later.