RESOLVING CONFLICTS AT WORK

At one point or another, people are bound to have differing opinions and disagree with each other at work. Handling disputes in a constructive way, before tensions erupt into full-blown conflict, is a skill that can be developed and practiced by anyone. Tips to get along with others in the workplace, communicate better, and handle disagreements respectfully include the following:

- **Listen to the other person's point of view without interrupting.** Leadership guru Stephen R. Covey once said "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." Active listening skills are perhaps the most important aspect of effective communication. It means paying full attention to the other person, being aware of the person's body language, asking clarification questions, and providing feedback to show that the message was understood.

- **Focus on problem-solving instead of blaming.** Pointing fingers usually puts people on the defensive and isn't productive. Ask the other person for his/her ideas on how to resolve the problem and approach it as a team effort.

- **Be positive and show appreciation for others.** Having a positive and hopeful attitude and thanking others for their hard work and contributions goes a long way toward building good working relationships. Everyone likes to feel valued and appreciated.

- **Don't fight fire with fire.** If the person seems unreasonable or difficult, arguing often makes things worse. At times everyone has had to deal with a difficult person, whether at home or work. Remain calm, think before reacting, and remember that most difficult people also have positive qualities. Look for ways to build rapport and set a constructive tone.

Taking the time to think about and improve your people skills has many benefits. Better workplace relationships can boost morale, make work more enjoyable, and even result in higher productivity and creativity.

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