

# Conflict - An Essential Ingredient For Growth

Conflict is inevitable in business relationships, just as it is in social relationships. Without conflict, growth is limited. Conflict is feared and avoided by many managers because they don't know how to deal with it. Unresolved conflict can be as poisonous to the productivity of your company as the virus is to the computer. Having an understanding about how people deal with conflict gives the manager an additional tool for managing effectively.

Everyone uses a variety of styles in conflict situations. When looking at conflict resolution, the persons involved, the importance of the issue, emotional states, and desired outcomes may all come into play. Resolving conflict has to do with one's willingness to be cooperative (helping others get what they want) and one's assertiveness (getting what they want). Everyone uses, to some degree, five styles when dealing with conflict. Let's examine each style.

1. **Avoiding** - When employees avoid conflict, they often withdraw and detach themselves from the issue. They are not willing to assert their own wants nor do they want to help others get what they want. For example, they tend to "mind their own business" and look the other way when other employees are discussing office politics or ways to equalize the work load.

2. **Accommodating** - When your employees accommodate others in order to avoid conflict, they will do whatever they can to help the other person get what they want, often to their own detriment. They give in to demands, even unreasonable ones, to avoid disagreement. For example, your employee may choose to do someone else's job rather than suggest that the responsible person complete it.

3. **Competing** - When your employees compete to "be right," their primary interest is in resolving the conflict *their* way. They have no interest in helping others get what they want. They become very defensive of their position and have difficulty understanding the reasons others don't see things *their* way. Employees may insist that everyone else drop what they're doing so *their* project can be completed in *their* time frame. Those who compete often take advantage of those who accommodate others.

4. **Compromising** - When employees compromise in order to resolve a conflict, they are willing to "give and take" with the others. They want both parties to be either satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome. Compromising is frequently used because it is expedient and both parties make concessions. For example, your employees in the Marketing Department may agree on the logo for the new sales initiative and disagree on the colour. So they both may give up their first choices and select a second colour that they both marginally agree to use.

5. **Collaborating** - When employees collaborate, they are interested in seeing that everyone's wants are met fully. These employees tend to consider themselves a team. They work creatively and are solution-oriented. The outcome of the conflict often leads to one that neither party held prior to the collaboration.

We often avoid when we don't want to get involved or we decide it's not worth the effort to pursue. It's important to "pick your battles" since they can't all be fought and won. We compete when we strongly believe in our ideas. We accommodate when we want others to like us or we like things to run smoothly or we don't feel like we have the right to remind others of their responsibilities. We often compromise when we are in a hurry. We use collaboration when we want everyone involved to feel "ownership" for the outcome.