



14 Suggestions to Reduce Negative Conflict and Increase Positive Conflict Outcomes

As leaders, it's our responsibility to take action to overcome obstacles that take away from productive workplace performance. With an estimated 2.7 hours of employee time wasted in conflict each week and 20-40% of a manager's time spent responding to conflict, conflict is sapping organizational productivity (CPP, 2019).

Remember, not all conflict is bad. When managed well, conflict leads to a better understanding of others, stronger teams, improved solutions to challenges, and successful innovation. Effective leaders need to proactively consider how to anticipate, mitigate, and reduce the drain of negative conflict while providing ways to encourage and benefit from productive conflict. The following suggestions offer ways to both reduce conflict and build practices that inspire and bring out the best in people.

- _____ 1. Provide clarity about which behaviors are and are not acceptable when engaging in conflict at work.
- _____ 2. Offer examples about how differences have led to positive outcomes in your company.
- _____ 3. Deal with toxic behaviors or bullying immediately. Express the consequences if the behavior continues.
- _____ 4. Step back and assess your own emotions before inserting yourself into a conflict situation.
- _____ 5. Build a norm for employees to first address conflict with the other person one-on-one before engaging others.
- _____ 6. Provide ways for team members to interact and build relationships to deepen understanding and appreciation for the skills and experiences others bring.
- _____ 7. Encourage informal conversations as a platform to better manage conflict in the future.
- _____ 8. Offer training for your team in handling difficult conversations, third-party advocacy, inclusive behaviors, giving and receiving feedback, etc.
- _____ 9. After training, reinforce and practice using the skills and tools that were presented.
- _____ 10. Check-in with employees periodically to see how they're doing, especially if you've noticed any of the following changes in behavior: requesting a transfer, more absences from meetings or discussions, distraction, disengagement or increased illnesses.
- _____ 11. When conflict occurs, address the situation quickly. Ask open-ended questions to gain clarity by listening first and advocating second.
- _____ 12. Serve as a role model for others. For example, ask for dissenting points of view, demonstrate how to handle differences of opinion, and invite those who haven't expressed themselves to offer their opinion.
- _____ 13. Acknowledge when you make a mistake or handle a situation less effectively than you would have preferred.
- _____ 14. Express gratitude and appreciation for peacemakers and those who handle conflict situations well.