



PROFESSIONAL Tips

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5 Tips for Diffusing Personality Conflicts

1. Ask yourself what is your role in the conflict? The adage “it takes two to tango” is a great starting point for thinking about handling conflict. Our first instinct may be to blame or want to be right. We must ask ourselves, “How might I be contributing to the misunderstanding?” Each of us has triggers or “hot buttons,” and once you determine yours, you will be better positioned to understand when people get to you.
2. Show respect for others. Create a cooperative and trusting environment by demonstrating your willingness to hear others’ views and concerns. Listening is not easy. Many of us have a tendency to mentally prepare our rebuttal while the other person is talking. Show that you are truly interested by using reflective listening. After you hear the other person, play it back to him or her with a simple statement such as, “this is what I hear you saying...” Not only does this show respect, but it ensures that you get it right.
3. Reflect on how your personality traits might differ from those of your colleagues and understand how opposite traits can generate conflict— if you let them.
4. As difficult as it may be, try to see value in working with diverse personalities. The best teams are often composed of people who see things through different lenses. If you can get over someone who “doesn’t contribute much in a meeting” (if you are outgoing) or someone who “talks about herself, relentlessly” (if you are more quiet and keep things to yourself), you may come to appreciate their ideas even if their style doesn’t match yours.
5. Separate the “small stuff” from the “big stuff.” You know the saying, “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” Often, personality conflicts can be small stuff— annoying behaviors of others that don’t do much other than frustrate us or make us mad. However, sometimes the behaviors are truly impacting productivity and our ability to get the work done. If this is the case, consider escalating the behavior to a manager or to human resources so that a third party can assist in mediating the conflict.

Conflict is unavoidable. It is a necessary and healthy part of our life experiences at work as well as at home. You can manage it to your advantage with respect and professionalism. If done well, you can learn more about yourself, explore the views of others, bring diversity into your life, and build more effective productive working relationships.

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