



## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION – HOW TO RESOLVE THOSE EMPLOYEE HEADACHES**

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Conflict will always be with us as the only thing consistent about people is that they are inconsistent. Trying to resolve issues with “Win/Win” solutions can be difficult. Within the employee relations world, this conflict comes about with employee performance issues or employee/employee and manager/employee differences.

Our first step to resolve a conflict is to provide counseling to employees. The plan is to provide guidance, affect a positive result and ultimately, improve the employee’s habits and behaviors. We all hope that this will help employees and resolve issues. Or we tell our staff to “work it out among yourselves” so we don’t have to deal with it at all. Too often, however, this only makes the situation worse and you have a bigger problem than before. Now we have real conflict.

In order to resolve this issue, there are five steps to the process that will aid managers in resolving employee conflict:

***Encourage the employee to take responsibility*** – When an employee comes to you, suggest that he/she talk directly with the person involved. This seems to be contrary to the statement above, however, what we mean is the *individual* not the group. If there is more than one individual involved, speak with each one *independently* of the other. Encourage adult conversation; don’t become “Mom” or “Dad” and be perceived as taking one side or the other.

***Help the employee with coaching and advice*** – Give the complaining employee help so that he/she knows how to deal with the other person. Often, employees do not know what to say and come to you looking for advice. Your skills as a manager should be passed on so that the employee can use proper techniques to get the wanted end result.

***Use first-hand examples when possible*** – If the situation worsens and you must get involved, use first-hand observations about the behavior. Focus on the behavior, not the person! Again, you do not want to be seen as taking sides. The value of examples is that it is hard to argue with facts. If a specific incident was observed, using it as part of your discussion reduces the level of argument. Facts are facts! Lacking any first-hand examples, use words like “In his (her) perception, this is what

happened. I'd like your point of view". This says you are only hearing one version and the other version is equally important and valuable.

***Use Contracting*** – This is a tool that is effective when you do not feel you are getting anywhere in the resolution process and both sides are really digging in for a fight. As the manager, meet with each person separately and then with them together. This will give you more control over the end result. During the one-on-one sessions, have each person outline *specifically* what he or she would be willing to do to resolve the situation. Ask what the other person could do and have them write everything down (keep your own notes as well). Go through their notes and look for common ground as a starting point. In the joint meeting, start off with common areas and let them discuss the other areas as well. Make your expectations clear to them and have them sign a “contract” committing to what they each will do. You can write the contract based on the verbal discussions. They will tend to comply if they put their name to an agreement.

***Use a facilitator*** – If all else fails, or if the people involved are senior level people, consider using an outside facilitator. This alternative allows for the facilitator to get past the entrenched emotions and find action steps that both parties can live with. The parties recognize that this person is an outsider, which makes him/her neutral. This also eliminates political maneuvering because the outside facilitator has no personal agenda and is not in the organization reporting structure.

No process is 100% fool proof and your goal is to stay out of the “Employee Complaint Black Hole”. Following this type of process will result in a high success rate in conflict resolution.

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