

# Let's Talk: Handling employee conflict

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Hi, I'm Daphne, let's talk about what to do when you and your employee have a conflict.

Conflict is inevitable. When we're working closely together, we're going to have some friction. And a lot of times we avoid this friction, we don't want to get into this conflict. It's very stressful. But if we take the time, we push into that space, and we are vulnerable, we can actually make things a lot better.

## Choose how to manage conflict

There are common ways that people deal with conflict. You may recognize yourself in some of these ways. At times, we avoid it altogether, disengage, don't participate any more. We could have a situation where we just give in. Maybe we engage, but we just give in and we don't really get our point across. We also sometimes are able to collaborate, really come together, get a little bit vulnerable, share our thoughts, and come to a place of collaboration. Ultimately, this is going to lead to more authentic relationships and abilities to make processes better.

## Make conflict productive

I think we have to really be deliberate and take account of how we handle conflict. It's really a normal thing for us to get triggered in times like that, sometimes people even stop breathing altogether and get really triggered and respond in very emotional ways. So, I think it's good to think about this ahead of time, like how do you typically respond to conflict? Think back to some times when you've been a conflictual situation. Think about you handled that and what was challenging about it and you might even want to rehearse some ways to handle that ahead of time. It's really good to kind of keep breathing through the process of being in the middle of a conversation that could be stressful. Take some deep, slow breaths and pay attention to the other person. Focus on what they're saying. Slow down the situation, don't feel like you have to rush. And I think you're going to find you're able to handle this a lot more effectively.

## Active listening

Let's talk a little bit about listening actively. This is a great technique when you're in a conflictual situation. First of all, you want to really focus in on what the other person is saying. You've probably heard before that it's common that while the other person's talking, we're thinking in our head already

of how we want to respond. And unfortunately this can block us from really hearing what they have to say. So, continue with that deep breathing. Listen to the other person. Be focused on them. In this day and time we have that phone around us all the time. You might be tempted in your stress to pick up your cell phone or glance in other directions, but this can really block the communication process. So, be really focused on that person. Focus in on what they're saying. Really listen. The other thing is you can really slow this down by deliberately taking 15, 20 seconds after they're done talking to just really kind of collect your thoughts and think about it before you respond and be sure to kind of reflect back to them what you think they said to you, because you may think you got it, but you may have missed something important that they had to say and they might need to clarify a few points before you give your opinion in the situation.

## Show you care

Empathy is super important when you're trying to align with someone and get through a conflict, so try to put yourself in their shoes. Really listen to what they're saying and try to kind of picture where they might be coming from. What's this like for them? And be sure to try to show that empathy back to them. It's good to maybe even reflect how you might sense that they're feeling, just to show that this is not just about words, or policies, or procedures, but it's about caring about them as a person. So, yeah, really try to put yourself in their shoes. Try to imagine what kind of things they might be feeling. And then check that out with them because sometimes we could be wrong. We might assume they're feeling one way but they're feeling another. But I think taking that extra time to understand where they are, with how they're feeling, can really help to provide some connection and again, push into that place of intimacy which we don't always think about in the workplace, but we want to really understand each other and build connections, so really think about that empathy as you're working through the conflict.

## Make a plan

Once you feel like you've really developed an understanding that's mutual regarding the problem and maybe some solutions, it's important to go ahead and put a plan together. It can be easy to leave a meeting maybe just having shared some thoughts and then find yourself feeling the same way within the next week or two. So it's important to be specific about next steps, putting a plan together that both people agree about, and then having a mutually agreed upon checkpoint in the future, just to come back, see how it's going, continue to problem solve together and not leave it hanging out there where it may not get resolved.

## **Conflict is normal**

Just remember, it's really natural and normal and a really good sign of health in a team when people do have conflict. It shows that people trust you and each other enough to let people know when they don't like something that's happening. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's a performance issue. So, definitely approach it with an open mind, and I think you will see some great growth in your team.

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