

KEYS: Conflict Management

Knowledge and Education for Your Success

2. Separate the people from the problem. *really* mad at your colleague, are you? While your colleague may seem like the problem, in reality, he or she is not. You are both committed to your shared goal, which in this case is disagreement about the color scheme for your webpage.



3. Focus on interests, not positions. Your *position* is to get the website completed on schedule and in accordance with quality standards.

4. Invent options for mutual gains. Instead of holding up progress because of your concerns about the color scheme (e.g., it deviates too much from the company's branding), consider (it might help to brainstorm alternative color schemes).

5. Insist on using objective criteria. You and your colleague explore color scheme options, keep your emotions at bay and allow objectivity to guide your decision-making (and that elephant out of the room). This approach will be most effective if ponder why you care (i.e., why does the color scheme matter?) then express your thoughts with mutual agreement that the color scheme is important.

Will you remember each of these steps in the heat of the moment? Probably not. What you should remember, though, is to keep your emotions at bay. This is often easier said than done, but you can do it!

- x Take a minute to calm down. Breathe, count to 10 (or 100!), pace whatever works for you.
- x Sleep on it. If your response to the conflict can wait, let it. Get a good night's sleep and talk to your colleague tomorrow.
- x Take a walk in a park. You can't gain a fresh perspective or enlightenment that could guide you to a mutually beneficial solution.

Checking your emotions will help you to appropriately channel your energy for the crucial conversations that need to be had. (See also, Fisher and Ury, 1991, and Switzer, 2002, p. 3). Sometimes crucial conversations are simply necessary.

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When managed well, these dialogues can lead to productive outcomes. Following are some tips for navigating crucial conversations (Patterson et al., 2002):

The “What” Skills

- Offer your observations and feelings about the situation.
- Share what your observations and feelings have led you to conclude about the situation.
- Encourage the other party to share his or her perspective.

The “How” Skills

- When sharing your observations, lay the foundation for testing your assumptions with the other party by using language that does not present your perspective as fact (e.g., “it seems...”; “my impression...”; etc.)
- Zip your lips and open your ears to give the other party a chance to be heard—even if their perspective differs from yours.

Finally, if you ever feel that you need coaching for managing a difficult situation, reach out to your manager or a situational mentor.

References

Fisher, R., Ury, W. L. (1991). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (2nd ed.). NY: Penguin Books.

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2002). *Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*. NY: McGraw-Hill.