

6 Steps for Handling Difficult Conflicts

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6 Steps to Handling Highly Charged, Complex, and/or Intractable Conflicts

1. Pre-plan Your Approach
2. Set the Stage
3. Actively Listening
4. Check for Understanding
5. State Your Needs
6. Reach Agreement





1. Pre-planning

- Ask yourself:
 - Is this a real problem?
 - What are the consequences of dealing with this conflict?
 - What are the benefits?
 - What is the best approach?
 - What is my goal in resolving this conflict?
- Confirm the facts and find examples
- Brainstorm possible solutions
- Optionally: create a meeting agenda





2. Set the Stage

- Start with friendly conversation
- Show you care
- Let them know you want to understand the problem and find a solution
- Set ground rules
- Keep your emotions in check
- Look for the win-win



3. Actively Listening

- Look at it from their viewpoint
- Listen actively
- Avoid defending, excusing, or explaining
- Ask questions to uncover the deeper truth
 - Can you describe the conflict?
 - Can you tell me what you want?
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings, even if you don't agree



4. Check for Understanding

- Paraphrase the message to ensure you've understood (facts and feelings)
- Value what they have said
 - I can see how you might feel that way
 - I don't agree but I value you, so let's exchange ideas
- Check non-verbal cues and respond accordingly (show you care and have heard them). Nonverbal examples:
 - Sighing
 - Crossing their arms
 - Rolling their eyes



5. State Your Needs

- Use I-Messages
 - I need help with this task
 - I need more lead time to do this work
 - Maybe I didn't explain it clearly



5. State Your Needs - Constructive Feedback Model

- When you (behavior)
- I feel
- Because I (consequences)
- (Pause)
- I would like (desired behavior)
- Because
- What do you think? (seek agreement)





6. Reach Agreement

- How can we find a way to meet your needs and my needs? (Win-Win Walk)
- Ask questions
 - What can I do to make the situation better?
 - What will you do to make the situation better?
- Delay if they aren't receptive (give you both cool off time)
- Document agreements
- Follow Up





A Word About Saying “No”

- Learn not to give a knee-jerk “yes”
 - “Let me get back to you on that”
- Have a policies, e.g., I don’t work on Saturdays
- Don’t accept unreasonable requests
 - The consequences aren’t usually as bad as you think
- But, don’t say “no” if it will cost you too much





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