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Workplace Conflict Resolution Essentials

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Learn to:

- Manage conflicts and restore peace in the workplace
- Create and maintain a positive working environment
- Maximise the potential of your team and improve productivity

Vivian Scott

Certified Professional Mediator



***Workplace
Conflict
Resolution
Essentials***

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DUMMIES[®]
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by Vivian Scott

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Introduction

Every day in offices, retail stores, factories and any number of other workplaces, people are having conflicts with co-workers. It's normal, natural and nothing to fear. When handled properly, conflict can actually create positive changes and new opportunities in your organisation. Successfully making the shift in your perspective from seeing only the negative in disagreements to seeing the prospect for positive change is the first step to resolving difficulties.

To find positive outcomes in what on the surface looks like a negative situation, you have to become skilled at calming the infernos by helping employees through discussions that prove to them that they can solve their own issues. Become a coach for your team and colleagues — someone they can trust to bring the real and right issues to the table for effective problem solving.

If you can broaden your perspective to include the other person's point of view, you're sure to come out of the dispute with a better working relationship. Being at the centre of controversy is never a good idea for anyone, so decide to use the uneasy situation as an opportunity to improve systems, relationships, and your credibility.

In this book, I tell you what the most common causes of workplace conflict are and how to address them by using a proven mediation method and philosophy. And remember: Every story always has more than one side.

About This Book

This book is a tool intended to help managers (or anyone who has a job) work through conflict with peers, subordinates and even bosses. It's primarily aimed at those employees in organisations who find themselves negotiating difficulties without the benefit of having professional conflict resolution or mediation experience.

Although my focus is on how to facilitate conflict resolution, if you're the person experiencing conflict, this book outlines the kinds of structures that may be in place to support you, and what will be expected of you during each step of the process. Throughout the book, I also highlight the kinds of attitudes (such as good communication, getting to the underlying issues of the conflict and taking personal responsibility in finding a solution) that can help everyone avoid workplace conflict, no matter what level.

The chapters are chock-full of facilitation techniques and tools that come from successful conflict resolution experts, delivered in a way that's easy to understand and ready for you to apply right away.

To help make this book easier to navigate, I include the following conventions:

- ✔ I introduce new terms in italics and then define them.
- ✔ I use bold text to highlight key words in bulleted lists.

Foolish Assumptions

I'm assuming you have a job, paid or volunteer, and that you interact with people. I'm also assuming you have some sort of responsibility — be it keeping the line moving at the manufacturing plant or trying to keep your reputation intact as the star manager in the strongest department of an international corporation. And I'm thinking you're currently experiencing some trouble. You may be sick and tired of a conflict between two of your employees, you may be bickering with a colleague, or perhaps you're at a loss as to what to do about the problems between you and your boss. My final assumption? I'm guessing you want to do something about it.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book you'll notice icons in the page margins to signal something I want you to pay particular attention to. Here are the icons I've used and what each represents.



If I know an easier way to do something or have an idea for creating a better working environment now and in the future, this icon tells you that.



I use this icon to flag some important information that you don't want to forget.



This icon alerts you to common blunders that you want to avoid.

Where to Go from Here

Workplace Conflict Resolution Essentials For Dummies is a book I hope you refer to again and again. You don't have to read it cover to cover to gain the insight you need to deal with conflict at work. You can flip to the chapter that best meets your needs today and come back to other sections as needed.

You may have a bookshelf full of management how-to tomes, but it's still a good idea to start with understanding what makes an employee tick and why she sees the world the way she does, so start with Chapter 2 to get right to the heart of the matter.

If you feel you have a pretty good handle on how emotions, values and group dynamics contribute to conflict, and you're ready to mediate a problem between two or more people, head straight to Chapter 6 and follow through to Chapter 10.

Finally, if you feel you may be in over your head and you'd like to find out more about how to enlist the help of an expert, check out Chapter 11 to see what your company may be able to do.

Although this book is designed so that you can start anywhere, don't feel obligated to jump around. If you're a traditionalist who likes to read every book from cover to cover, just turn the page!



Five Things You Can Control When in an Unresolved Conflict

- ✓ **Your plan for the future:** Consider what's important to you and follow a strategy for a period of time that feels comfortable. Knowing what you want your future to look like helps you look past the current situation and focus beyond temporary problems.
- ✓ **Your perspective:** Instead of staying wrapped up in a conflict, ask yourself whether you can find a learning opportunity somewhere in the situation. Or maybe if you purposefully and mindfully examine what's going on, you can honestly say, in the scope of things, the disagreements aren't really that important to you.
- ✓ **Your responses:** You can't control someone else's actions, thoughts or feelings. But you can control how you react to what's happening, and look for ways to respond to hot button topics that won't escalate your anxiety or your anger.
- ✓ **Your investment:** In trying to control everything, you lose your ability to control anything! Instead, try to reduce your investment in the drama. Spend less time thinking about it, talking about it and engaging in it.
- ✓ **Your role in the conflict:** Step outside of your thoughts and feelings and consider how your actions and reactions look to others. Consider the impact of your actions, and honestly identify your role in the conflict. When you have your answer, see what you're willing to change.



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Chapter 1

Conflict Resolution at Work

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Looking at causes of workplace conflict
 - ▶ Using a mediation process to help employees through problems
 - ▶ Finding and using conflict expertise
-

You may love your family and friends but, truth be told, you spend much of your time with the people at work. Not getting along with co-workers or having members of your team at odds with one another can be stressful and distracting. In addition, problems in the workplace rarely stay at work; they can permeate every aspect of your life. So you need to take the time to understand what's behind a conflict, get beyond the surface issues and work to help find satisfying resolutions for everyone involved.

Settling differences effectively requires you to step back and look at the broader picture, be mindful of another person's point of view, and take into account peripheral factors that may be creating or provoking problems, like group dynamics or workplace norms.

In this chapter, I give you an overview of conflict resolution so you can successfully mediate problems in your workplace, whether those problems are between two individuals or within a larger group. I also tell you about additional conflict resolution resources you may have at your disposal.

Considering Common Contributors to Conflict

For the most part, workplace difficulties fall into common categories, such as

- ✓ Communication (and miscommunication)
- ✓ Employee attitudes
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Insubordination
- ✓ Treatment of others
- ✓ Work habits

Effectively addressing conflict takes into account the obvious surface issue, the emotional climate surrounding the topic, and your knowledge of the viewpoints of the people involved in the dispute. In this section, I provide insight into how differing perspectives can cause employees to feel like ships passing in the night. I also discuss emotions, touch on the importance of communication in your organisation, and look at group dynamics, including your role in the group.

Acknowledging differing perspectives

You and each of the employees on your team have a lens through which you see the world and one another. Everything you see, hear and say goes through your filter on the way in *and* on the way out. These filters determine how you present and receive information.

Your individual kaleidoscope is shaped by things like your personal history, education, values, culture and the roles you play in your life, both at work and at home. Everything you consider important works together to create your worldview. The same is true for your co-workers.



Values in this context are things like safety, respect, autonomy and recognition.

Being familiar with your employees' and colleagues' values helps you resolve conflicts. For example, say that two employees are having an argument over where to stack some binders.