

Four Steps To Conflict Resolution

Step One - Find a Time to Talk

- Approach the other party without hostility.
- State the issue to be discussed (e.g. "I know we've been having some issues lately and I would like to sit down and talk about it."). Also, make the request (e.g. "Would that be okay with you?" or "Can we do that?").
- Set down cardinal rules (e.g. "I just want you to know that I will not withdraw from the discussion or try to force you to see things my way. I would like to ask that you give me the same respect.").
- Set a time and place that is convenient for both parties.

Step Two - Plan the Context

- Choose a location that will be neutral (preferably not one person's office but rather a conference room) and free from interruptions. This includes being free from telephone calls and people walking by or into the meeting. This type of dialogue should not be attempted over a meal.
- Allow for sufficient time to finish the conversation. Fifteen minutes is not enough time. Parties should not have other commitments immediately following the session.
- Choose a location where confidentiality is possible and others will not overhear your conversation.
- No one else should be present.

Step Three - Talk it Out

- Open the conversation by showing appreciation and optimism about the meeting and the other party's willingness to participate. .
Restate the issue (e.g. "I feel we've been having some conflict lately and I would like to resolve it.").
- Invite the other party to share their viewpoint first. Listen attentively and do not interrupt to add your opinion.
- Once they are finished, begin the true dialogue. Share your opinions on the subject without attributing the problem to the character of the person. Allow feedback and watch for nonverbal feedback. Support conciliatory gestures and maintain the 'essential process.' In other words, do not allow withdrawal or power-plays.
- Avoid talking about trivial subjects (such as the weather) and other people who are not relevant to the situation. Avoid giving up or falling silent. .
- Work towards a breakthrough – the point at which you find a common ground on some aspect of the issue. Work from this point to come to agreement on the source and issues involved in the conflict.
- If for some reason the dialogue needs to end, but is not finished - make sure a second meeting time and place is decided *at this point*.

Step Four - Make a Deal

- Decide on a course of action to alleviate the conflict.

-The deal should be balanced. Both parties should be giving equal time, energy, and resources to making the plan work.

-The deal should be behaviorally specific. Do not expect to "start acting nicer." Rather plan to stop talking behind the other person's back or stop cutting the other person down in meetings.

-When possible, the deal should be written down to encourage accountability and commitment. It also allows for better understanding of a complex deal.

Taken from Dana, D. (1996) *Managing differences* (2nd Ed.). Overland Park, KS: MTI Publications.