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## Dealing with Conflict in the Workplace

The workplace can be a diverse environment with numerous communication styles and viewpoints. Sometimes this leads to conflict, which is not always a bad thing. In fact, studies have found that some of the most effective workplace teams are those where members feel secure enough to disagree with one another. This type of conflict can expose unique perspectives and open the floor to new ideas and ways of doing things. However, according to organizational psychologist Michael Woodward, conflict can be unhealthy when it becomes emotional or personal. In these situations, it is important to take steps to de-escalate the situation.

### The Heart of Conflict

The heart of conflict is difference. These differences can range from different priorities to different perspectives. While it may be tempting to let employees work out their differences, HR should step in when employees are threatening to quit, disagreements get personal (i.e., loss of respect between employees), or when the conflict is negatively impacting the organization.

### Guidelines for Resolving Conflict

The Society for Human Resource Management suggests setting a meeting between the concerned parties in a neutral location and using the following 10 guidelines to help resolve workplace conflict.

1. Set ground rules. Ask all parties to treat each other with respect and to make an effort to listen and understand others' views.
2. Ask each participant to describe the conflict, including desired changes. Direct participants to use "I" statements, not "you" statements. They

should focus on specific behaviors and problems rather than people.

3. Ask participants to restate what others have said.
4. Summarize the conflict based on what you have heard and obtain agreement from participants.
5. Brainstorm solutions. Discuss all of the options in a positive manner.
6. Rule out any options that participants agree are unworkable.
7. Summarize all possible options for a solution.
8. Assign further analysis of each option to individual participants.
9. Make sure all parties agree on the next steps.
10. Close the meeting by asking participants to shake hands, apologize, and thank each other for working to resolve the conflict.

### What This Means for Counties

When workplace conflict gets too personal or emotional, address it quickly and preferably at the local level. If this is not possible, bring in an outside expert. This is especially important in cases where there are discrimination or harassment allegations that exposes the county to legal risk. CTSI offers conflict mediation services free to members.

Contact Dana Mumey, CTSI's Senior Human Resource Specialist at 303-861-0507 for more information about conflict resolution or to learn more about the courses CTSI offers on this topic. [ctsi](http://www.ctsi.org)