

Four Ways to Deal with Conflict at Work

Introduction

In 2009, Dr. Tony Fiore, a licensed psychologist specializing in personal coaching and anger management, created a video presentation on workplace conflict. Dr. Fiore has years of experience counseling people on how to live a fulfilling, conflict free life. In Dr. Fiore's video, he discusses why conflict occurs in the workplace and steps managers can take to reduce conflict.

In this reading, we will take a closer look at Dr. Fiore's philosophy on why conflict arises in the workplace and the four steps he outlines for managers to reduce workplace conflict.

Why Does Conflict Arise in the Workplace?

According to Dr. Fiore, conflict arises in the workplace for a variety of reasons. We will explore the four reasons why conflict arises in the workplace below.

1. *Misinterpretation* – One reason why conflict occurs might be that a person is misunderstood and the person's message is misinterpreted. People often hear someone's message but only remember a portion of what a person says, so people end up using their own words and opinions to fill in the rest.
2. *Competition* – Dr. Fiore cites employees competing for position advancement and recognition as another source of conflict. It is natural for a person to experience conflict if a person feels taken for granted or not recognized for his or her hard work. In addition, conflict can occur as fellow employees compete for a promotion, resulting in some people feeling hurt when they are passed up for the position.
3. *Different values and expectations* – According to Dr. Fiore, another source of conflict can arise from employees having different values and expectations than fellow employees, managers, and leaders. Companies may not have clearly stated goals, leaving the employees feeling confused and unaware of what objectives to meet. On the other hand, employees may have personal values that do not match up with the company's values, resulting in conflict.

4. *Unrealistic goals and expectations* – Dr. Fiore notes that employees often have unrealistic goals and expectations of their job responsibilities. These misunderstandings set the foundation for an employee to feel disappointed and discouraged when they are unable meet these goals. Then, employees become resentful of the company and unmotivated to try again.

Regardless of the specific reason for the conflict, the fact remains that conflict is very prevalent in the workplace. According to Dr. Fiore, 24% to 60% of a manager's time is spent on conflict management. This statistic reinforces the significance of conflict management in the workplace and emphasizes the need for managers to find practical ways to deal with conflict. To address this need, Dr. Fiore outlines four steps for managers to reduce workplace conflict. In the next section, these steps are discussed in detail.

Four Ways to Reduce Workplace Conflict

According to Dr. Fiore, managers can reduce conflict in the workplace by following these four suggestions.

1. *Communicate effectively.* Dr. Fiore states that managers should review and analyze how they communicate with others to ensure communication is effective. For instance, managers should assess the types of words they choose when communicating. Do they use *I* or *you* statements when describing the problem? By using *I*, managers demonstrate their willingness to accept responsibility for their feelings instead of putting the blame on the other person by using *you*. This practice also enables a person to properly express his or her feelings and to be more effective at getting his or her point across to the other person.

Dr. Fiore claims that listening effectively is another important component to communicating effectively as a manager. When managers listen attentively, they allow the other person to express himself or herself honestly and openly, often eliminating personal barriers. In return, managers are able to better understand the other person's perspective, concerns, reservations, and motivations, leading to a healthy two-way communication.

In addition, Dr. Fiore notes that a manager who communicates effectively acts as a role model to others. When fellow managers and employees see how well you are able to communicate, they are inspired to conduct themselves in

a similar way. Your actions teach others effective ways to communicate without promoting conflict.

2. *Establish clear expectations.* Without clear expectations and boundaries, Dr. Fiore claims that conflict and power struggles will frequently occur. People thrive in a well-established environment where boundaries are clearly stated and goals are defined. These parameters allow a person to excel, within the acceptable limits, and reduce ambiguity and confusion, which spawns conflict. To minimize conflict, a manager should ensure expectations are clearly stated and communicated to fellow workers.

In addition, Dr. Fiore says that once expectations are clearly established, managers should hold employees accountable to these standards. It is critical that employees recognize their responsibility to work within these parameters. As a manager, you can remain kind and sympathetic toward employees, while holding them accountable to certain standards.

3. *Use emotional intelligence.* Dr. Fiore defines *emotional intelligence* as the process of combining a person's intellectual intelligence with people skills. For example, a manager with a high IQ may be able to perform a task accurately but may not be able to interact with others in a professional manner. A manager that is able to combine these two skills by using emotional intelligence becomes better equipped to interact with and motivate employees who have different personality styles. They come across to others as sensitive, caring, and compassionate managers; this perception reduces hostility and conflict with employees.

4. *Set consequences in advance.* Dr. Fiore suggests that managers set and enforce consequences in order to reduce workplace conflict. Employees have to be held accountable for their actions. They must know what behaviors are acceptable and must be reprimanded for ones that violate set boundaries.

In addition, consequences should be established and communicated well before someone disobeys the standards. Employees should know exactly what would happen if they break the rules. When a manager communicates consequences to employees, it should be done in a calm and non-threatening way to ease contention and conflict.

Summary:

- Dr. Fiore is a licensed psychologist who specializes in personal coaching and anger management; Dr. Fiore created a video presentation in 2009 on workplace conflict.
- According to Dr. Fiore, conflict arises in the workplace for a variety of reasons, which include:
 1. employees and managers misunderstanding or misinterpreting an employee's message;
 2. employees competing for positions of advancement and for recognition;
 3. employees, coworkers, and managers having different values; and
 4. employees having unrealistic goals and expectations of their job responsibilities.
- Dr. Fiore outlines four ways that allow managers to reduce conflict in the workplace.
 1. *Communicate effectively.* Managers should look at how they are communicating with others, actively listen, and be role models for effective communication.
 2. *Establish clear expectations.* To reduce conflict and confusion, managers should set clear expectations, standards, and boundaries while holding employees accountable to these standards.
 3. *Use emotional intelligence.* By combining a person's intellectual intelligence with people skills, a manager is better equipped to deal with all types of people and to reduce interpersonal conflict.
 4. *Set consequences in advance.* Managers should set, communicate, and enforce consequences to ease contention and conflict with employees.

Reference:

Fiore, T. 2009. *Four Ways to Deal with Workplace Conflict*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-bH-h6WJAY>