



# How to Resolve a Disagreement with a Colleague

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Workplace conflicts do more than cause stress among the people in conflict; that stress can spill into other relationships at work and affect the atmosphere of the *whole* office. It's important that all employees learn how to resolve a disagreement with a colleague.

**When you encounter disagreements, try these tips to help resolve conflicts and bring peace back to your workplace:**

- 1. Remember that most disagreements are a *perceived* problem.** One person expected that the other would act, react, or respond in a particular way. When the expected response wasn't given, the first person feels annoyed, slighted, frustrated, or angry.
  - The person you have a disagreement with is not the problem. Can you explain to someone not involved what the conflict is about without blaming the other person?
  - ***Gather each person involved in the disagreement, plus someone who can act as a mediator, and discuss the issue at hand.*** Brainstorm together and try to find a number of solutions for the problem. Write down all the solutions you discuss.
  - Instead of attacking the person, attack the common problem. Go back to the solution list and analyze each possible solution until you reach one that will benefit both parties.
- 2. Address conflicts as soon as possible.** Allowing a conflict to continue will only worsen it. Conflicts are bound to happen when groups of people work closely together. The trick is to stop the process before it has a chance to snowball into something more.

3. **Never assume that people act a particular way or say something just to annoy you.** They may not have realized their action, inaction, or speech affected you the way it did. If in doubt, ask the person to clarify their actions rather than assuming why they did it.
4. **If you're not involved in the problem, avoid taking sides.** Instead, look for common ground that both parties share. Finding common ground on as many things as possible will help both parties see that they aren't so different after all.

***This will pave the way for finding a solution that both can be satisfied with.***

- Similarities don't have to be only work related; however it would be better if they were. At this point, find and write down anything that you can think of that is shared between the people involved in the conflict.
5. **Use specific, appropriate terms when talking things out.** Coming in five minutes late regularly is much different than never being present for meetings. Be sure to use facts to back up statements rather than making generalities.
  6. **Focus on finding a solution to the problem.** Don't keep re-hashing what happened over and over until emotions get riled up again. By keeping the focus on the present, it will keep communications from becoming heated or destructive.
  7. **Take the high road and apologize,** even if you don't feel that the conflict is your fault. You can still apologize for your part in the disagreement. It's not necessary for you to take the entire blame, but you do share a certain amount of responsibility.

Your best bet in resolving a disagreement with your colleague is to sit down calmly, with a mediator, and discuss the perceived problem. Allow each person to speak without interruption.

Working together to find a mutually beneficial solution is not only in the best interest of each party, but it's also in the best interest of the workplace.