

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE OFFICE

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Wherever you find people, at home or at the office, you'll find "conflict".**
 - People disagree about things.
 - It's a fact of life, and it doesn't have to be a problem.
- **In a workplace, conflicts that are handled appropriately can be a source of innovation and positive change, both for employees and the companies they work for.**
- **But when conflicts go unresolved, they can raise stress levels, interfere with business and even lead to physical violence.**
 - To prevent this, human resource professionals have developed an effective conflict resolution process that employees can use to help find lasting solutions to disagreements on the job.
- **When conflicts that arise in a workplace are not resolved, they can raise employees' stress levels, damage their morale and even lead to physical violence.**
 - Smoldering disagreements can also reduce worker productivity and hurt a company's reputation.
 - So it's important to be able to recognize and deal with workplace conflicts promptly and effectively.
- **To resolve disagreements, it helps to understand a few things about the "conflicts" themselves.**
 - Because workplace conflict occurs where we make our living, it can seem like a threat to our livelihood.
 - This can make it more difficult to see an issue from the other person's point of view.
- **Conflict doesn't only affect the people who are involved directly in the dispute, either.**
 - It can create a tense and even hostile work environment for everyone around them.
- **To prevent this, it's important to determine what caused the conflict in the first place.**

- **For example, employees sometimes disagree about what goals they should be working towards.**
 - It's very unusual for goals to really be "mutually exclusive".
 - Looking at "the bigger picture" can help us see how multiple objectives fit together in an overall plan.
- **Even when we agree about the goals we're pursuing, we can still disagree on how to accomplish them.**
 - These are called "procedural conflicts".
 - They can often be resolved by combining different strategies into a plan, and then compromising on how to proceed.
- **Other conflicts can arise from simple misunderstandings, lack of communication or poor data.**
 - In these situations it's important for coworkers to establish "common ground" by ensuring that everyone has the most reliable, accurate, and up-to-date information possible.
- **But we can still disagree about what facts mean.**
 - These types of differences of opinion can often be resolved through friendly discussion.
 - Talking about the dispute also helps to establish a better understanding of the issues for the whole team.
- **But it is important to remember that conflict is like a forest fire.**
 - If you don't extinguish it completely, one spark can make it flare up again.
- **So any solution to a conflict has to work for everyone who is involved.**
 - If one party is dissatisfied the issue really hasn't been resolved.
- **Workplace conflict can be a real pain in the neck.**
 - No employee welcomes the distraction that a disagreement causes during a busy workday.
 - Resolving the issue makes additional demands on our time and energy as well.
- **It may be natural to wish for "quick and easy" solutions to on-the-job disputes, but they often make resolution more difficult.**
- **"Competing", "yielding" and "avoiding" are three common responses to conflict that not only fail to resolve a problem, but can actually make it worse.**

- **For example, in "competing" a person tries to shut down the conflict by fighting for what they want and overcoming the opposition by "force".**
- **Competing is an ineffective technique for resolving conflicts for two reasons.**
 - First, it tends to escalate the disagreement.
 - Second, while one person may "win", someone else ends up "losing".
- **While the winner may be happy with the result, the loser remains dissatisfied.**
 - Since everyone's needs and concerns have not been addressed, the conflict is bound to crop up again later.
- **Another ineffective approach to conflict resolution is called "yielding", when one party to the conflict tries to make peace by surrendering to the other.**
 - Someone who is yielding might say something like, "I don't have time to argue about this. Have it your way".
- **But yielding doesn't create a lasting resolution because someone still has to "lose".**
 - Even an employee who surrenders voluntarily may come to regret the decision.
 - Then their bitterness and anger can cause the conflict to flare up again.
- **The third bad habit that people develop in dealing with conflicts is "avoiding".**
 - This is when an employee basically ignores a conflict, "looking the other way" and pretending it isn't happening.
 - Avoiding may reduce their stress temporarily, but it's no substitute for a real resolution.
 - Conflicts do not go away by themselves.
- **Instead of resolving a conflict, competing, yielding and avoiding just delay the time when a real effort can be made to solve the problem.**
 - It's important to remember that typically the longer the resolution is delayed, the more a conflict escalates.
 - Putting off a resolution can increase both the bitterness of the dispute and the possibility that it will lead to violence.
- **Effective conflict resolution is based on a set of problem-solving skills that can help you to defuse disputes and find a permanent solution.**
 - It's critical for you to understand and use these skills.
 - Workplace conflict that isn't dealt with won't "fade away", it just gets worse.

- **Unresolved conflicts can interfere with business, damage employee morale and drive down productivity.**
 - The longer these situations go unsolved, the more likely they are to lead to workplace violence, as well.
- **It's also important to understand that no resolution is possible when the parties to a conflict stay in their own "corners", unwilling to modify their own positions.**
 - We all have to work together to solve the problem.
 - This is called collaboration.
- **Collaboration requires us to let go of the "I'm right and you're wrong" mind-set, as well as any anger the disagreement has caused.**
 - Letting emotions drive your behavior will only make it harder to reach out to others and find a solution.
- **It helps to take a step back and look at the "big picture".**
 - Remember that you're all professionals working towards overcoming a challenge for the good of the company, and for yourselves.
- **All of the people who are involved need to communicate, to explain their positions and find some common ground.**
 - You should be assertive about your own needs and concerns.
 - You should also consider those of the other people who are involved.
- **So be prepared to compromise.**
 - Weigh your priorities and decide where you can "give a little to get a little".
 - Negotiating these trade-offs can be the most time and effort-intensive part of the conflict resolution process.
 - It's also key to finding a successful solution.
- **Sometimes conflict can get very intense, very quickly.**
 - In these cases it can outrun people's ability to respond to it peacefully.
 - Tempers fray, emotions run high, and suddenly a violent clash seems imminent.
- **These situations are called "confrontations".**
 - And they require special handling.
- **If a conflict causes you to become involved in a confrontation with a coworker, there are a number of things you can do to help defuse the situation.**

- **First, remain calm.**
 - Breathe normally.
 - Becoming excited or emotional will only make things worse.
- **Do not raise your voice or shout.**
 - Even if the other person is getting loud, you should continue to speak quietly.
 - Explain to them that you want to "understand" their point of view.
 - Ask them to explain their concerns.
- **Then let them speak.**
 - Don't interrupt.
 - Don't disagree or be judgmental.
- **When they're finished, show that you understand by restating their position in your own words.**
- **Phrase what you say using the words "I" and "we" instead of "you" whenever possible.**
 - Statements using "you" can sound like accusations and may put the other person on the defensive.
- **There are a number of physical things you need to remember:**
 - Don't fidget or make fists.
 - Don't cross your arms (keep them low, in a non-threatening position).
 - Try to stay at least five feet away from the other person.
 - Avoid bodily contact.
- **If the other person pushes or tries to hit you, you should just walk away.**
 - Pushing or hitting them back will only intensify the confrontation.
- **If the other person grabs you, you should try to break free and get clear.**
 - If you can't get away, call for help.
 - There's usually someone nearby who can assist you.
- **Do not allow yourself to get drawn into a fight. You could:**
 - Be seriously injured.
 - Face disciplinary action from your employer.
 - Be arrested for assault.

- **You could even be sued by the person who you were fighting with... no matter who started it!**

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **Handled correctly, workplace conflict can be a source of innovation and positive change.**
- **Conflict that goes unresolved can be bad for people and for business.**
- **Remember that "quick and easy" responses to conflict do not address the roots of a dispute.**
- **Taking the time to collaborate, communicate and compromise with your coworkers is the best way to resolve conflict.**
- **If a confrontation occurs, you can defuse the situation and help to prevent violence by staying calm and avoiding being drawn into a fight.**
- **Now that you understand the problems that conflict can create and know how to find lasting solutions to any disputes that do arise, you can help make your office more pleasant and productive for everyone... every day!**