

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION/FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT

## Essential Question:

What kinds of conflict are in your life, community, and world?

How can these conflicts be resolved in a peaceful and professional manner?

Why is understanding my personal conflict style important in handling conflict best?

## Measurable Outcomes:

-Students will identify their own personal conflict style

-Students will learn how to work with people who have a different conflict style

-Students will learn techniques to resolve conflict productively

## Education:

To be an effective leader, it's important to learn how to help a team resolve conflict productively and satisfactorily for all members of the team. This unit focuses on helping teens gain awareness of their style of dealing with disagreements, how to take constructive feedback, and also how to give it.

## Activity:

Complete the Conflict Management Style activity by The Leadership Center at Washington University. Have students fill out the chart on page 7 and discuss their results. Students should keep this and refer to it throughout the year to help them manage conflict more effectively. Also, an optional activity would be to have students role play different conflict situations in a skit and try to resolve them appropriately.

Peer evaluations: Based on committees or work groups, give each student a feedback card for each person in their group. Have students complete them and hand it to the people in their group. Each student then reads the feedback they received aloud to the group in first person. Students will then be able to see their strengths and weaknesses. Students should be honest, fair, and respectful.

Read the article "Taking Constructive Criticism Like A Champ" from Forbes and discuss with students.

Read the article "Giving Constructive Criticism-That Won't Make Anyone Cringe" by Jennifer Winer and discuss with students.

**Standards**

SP.PK12.US.3.2b

Use appropriate social skills and strategies to interact with peers and adults across settings, such as cooperative learning, participating in small and large groups, giving and accepting appropriate feedback, assuming a leadership role, and resolving conflicts.

G.K12.6.1.4c

Evaluation - Perform: Reflect on failures and successes through self-evaluation; acknowledge constructive criticism.

TH.912.C.2.8

Improve a performance or project using various self-assessment tools, coaching, feedback, and/or constructive criticism.

**Resources:**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/dailymuse/2012/11/07/taking-constructive-criticism-like-a-champ/#771c5a8058b7>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/dailymuse/2012/06/05/giving-constructive-criticism-that-wont-make-anyone-criinge/#1c8b7d882a3a>

<http://www.afc-ispis.org/Repository/Conflict-Management%20survey.pdf>

### Conflict Management Styles Quiz

Source: Reginald (Reg) Adkins, PhD, Elemental Truths

<http://elementaltruths.blogspot.com/2006/11/conflict-management-quiz.html>

We each have our own way of dealing with conflict. The techniques we use are based on many variables such as our basic underlying temperament, our personality, our environment and where we are in our academic career. However, by and large there are five major styles of conflict management techniques in our tool box. In order to address conflict we draw from a collaborating, competing, avoiding, harmonizing or compromising style of management. None of these strategies is superior in and of itself. How effective they are depends on the context in which they are used.

Each statement below provides a strategy for dealing with a conflict. Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 4 indicating how likely you are to use this strategy.

**1 = Rarely**

**2 = Sometimes**

**3 = Often**

**4 = Always**

Be sure to answer the questions indicating how you would behave rather than how you think you should behave.

1. I explore issues with others so as to find solutions that meet everyone's needs. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I try to negotiate and adopt a give-and-take approach to problem situations. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I try to meet the expectations of others. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I would argue my case and insist on the merits of my point of view. \_\_\_\_\_
5. When there is a disagreement, I gather as much information as I can and keep the lines of communication open. \_\_\_\_\_
6. When I find myself in an argument, I usually say very little and try to leave as soon as possible. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I try to see conflicts from both sides. What do I need? What does the other person need? What are the issues involved? \_\_\_\_\_
8. I prefer to compromise when solving problems and just move on. \_\_\_\_\_
9. I find conflicts challenging and exhilarating; I enjoy the battle of wits that usually follows. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Being at odds with other people makes me feel uncomfortable and anxious. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I try to accommodate the wishes of my friends and family. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I can figure out what needs to be done and I am usually right. \_\_\_\_\_
13. To break deadlocks, I would meet people halfway. \_\_\_\_\_
14. I may not get what I want but it's a small price to pay for keeping the peace. \_\_\_\_\_
15. I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself. \_\_\_\_\_

How to score the Conflict Management Quiz:

As stated, the 15 statements correspond to the five conflict resolution styles. To find your most preferred style, total the points in the respective categories. The one with the highest score indicates your most commonly used strategy. The one with the lowest score indicates your least preferred strategy. However, if you are a leader who must deal with conflict on a regular basis, you may find your style to be a blend of styles.

<u>Style</u>	<u>Corresponding Statements:</u>	<u>Total:</u>
Collaborating:	1, 5, 7	_____
Competing:	4, 9, 12	_____
Avoiding:	6, 10, 15	_____
Harmonizing:	3, 11, 14	_____
Compromising:	2, 8, 13	_____

### **Brief Descriptions of the Five Conflict Management Styles**

**Collaborating Style:** Problems are solved in ways in which an optimum result is provided for all involved. Both sides get what they want and negative feelings are minimized.

Pros: Creates mutual trust; maintains positive relationships; builds commitments. Cons: Time consuming; energy consuming.

**Competing Style:**

Authoritarian approach.

Pros: Goal oriented: quick.

Cons: May breed hostility.

**Avoiding Style:** The non-confrontational approach.

Pros: Does not escalate conflict; postpones difficulty.

Cons: Unaddressed problems; unresolved problems.

**Harmonizing Style:** Giving in to maintain relationships.

Pros: Minimizes injury when we are outmatched; relationships are maintained. Cons: Breeds resentment; exploits the weak.

**Compromising Style:** The middle ground approach.

Pros: Useful in complex issues without simple solutions; all parties are equal in power. Cons: No one is ever really satisfied; less than optimal solutions get implemented.

Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Positive Words to Describe:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Things he/she does well:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Something he/she can work on or improve upon:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Positive Words to Describe:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Things he/she does well:

\_\_\_\_\_

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Something he/she can work on or improve upon:

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Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Name:

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

Things he/she does well:

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Name:

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Name:

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Something he/she can work on or improve upon:

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Taking Constructive Criticism Like a Champ**

I've always envied people who can graciously accept constructive criticism. It seems I was not born with that trait, and throughout my career I've struggled with receiving feedback, even when it was entirely accurate. At the moment I hear the words of critique, my heartbeat quickens and my mind begins to race—first in search of an explanation for this assault on my person and then for a retort to rationalize whatever actions are in question.

And I'm not alone. Unfortunately, in the heat of the moment, many of us react with defensiveness and anger or—even worse—attack the person giving us feedback. But the truth is, we need to get over it. We know there's value in constructive criticism—how else would we identify weaknesses and areas of improvement?—and being able to handle it calmly and professionally will only help us maintain relationships and be more successful in everything we do.

So how do you learn to back off the defensive? The next time you receive constructive criticism from your manager or a peer, use this six-step process to handle the encounter with tact and grace.

### **1. Stop Your First Reaction**

At the first sign of criticism, before you do anything—stop. Really. Try not to react at all! You will have at least one second to stop your reaction. While one second seems insignificant in real life, it's ample time for your brain to process a situation. And in that moment, you can halt a dismissive facial expression or reactive quip and remind yourself to stay calm.

### **2. Remember the Benefit of Getting Feedback**

Now, you have a few seconds to quickly remind yourself of the benefits of receiving constructive criticism—namely, to improve your skills, work product, and relationships, and to help you meet the expectations that your manager and others have of you.

You should also try to curtail any reaction you're having to the person who is delivering the feedback. It can be challenging to receive criticism from a co-worker, a peer, or someone that you don't fully respect, but remember, accurate and constructive feedback comes even from flawed sources.

### **3. Listen for Understanding**

You've avoided your typical reaction, your brain is working, and you've recalled all the benefits of feedback—high-five! Now, you're ready to engage in a productive dialogue as your competent, thoughtful self (as opposed to your combative, *Mean Girls* self).

As the person shares feedback with you, listen closely. Allow the person to share his or her complete thoughts, without interruption. When he or she is done, repeat back what you heard. For example, "I hear you saying that you want me to provide more detailed weekly reports, is that right?" At this point, avoid analyzing or questioning the person's assessment; instead, just focus on understanding his or her comments and perspective. And give the benefit of the doubt here—hey, it's difficult to give feedback to

another person. Recognize that the person giving you feedback may be nervous or may not express his or her ideas perfectly.

#### **4. Say Thank You**

Next (and this is a hard part, I know), look the person in the eyes and thank him or her for sharing feedback with you. Don't gloss over this—be deliberate, and say, "I really appreciate you taking the time to talk about this with me." Expressing appreciation doesn't have to mean you're agreeing with the assessment, but it does show that you're acknowledging the effort your colleague took to evaluate you and share his or her thoughts.

#### **5. Ask Questions to Deconstruct the Feedback**

Now it's time to process the feedback—you'll probably want to get more clarity at this point and share your perspective. Avoid engaging in a debate; instead, ask questions to get to the root of the actual issues being raised and possible solutions for addressing them. For example, if a colleague tells you that you got a little heated in a meeting, here are a few ways to deconstruct the feedback:

- Seek specific examples to help you understand the issue: "I was a little frustrated, but can you share when in the meeting you thought I got heated?"
- Acknowledge the feedback that is not in dispute: "You're right that I did cut him off while he was talking, and I later apologized for that."
- Try to understand whether this is an isolated issue (e.g., a mistake you made once): "Have you noticed me getting heated in other meetings?"
- Seek specific solutions to address the feedback: "I'd love to hear your ideas on how I might handle this differently in the future."

#### **6. Request Time to Follow Up**

Hopefully, by this point in the conversation, you can agree on the issues that were raised. Once you articulate what you will do going forward, and thank the person again for the feedback, you can close the conversation and move on.

That said, if it's a larger issue, or something presented by your boss, you may want to ask for a follow-up meeting to ask more questions and get agreement on next steps. And that's OK—it'll give you time to process the feedback, seek advice from others, and think about solutions.

Constructive criticism is often the only way we learn about our weaknesses—without it we can't improve. When we're defensive, instead of accepting and gracious, we run the risk of missing out on this important insight. Remember, feedback is not easy to give and it's certainly not easy to receive, but it will help us now and in the long run.

### **Giving Constructive Criticism -- That Won't Make Anyone Cringe**

I'll go right ahead and start out by admitting that unless everything is going great, giving and receiving feedback can be pretty rough. The term "constructive criticism" was surely invented as a cruel joke to staff and managers alike.

But, as a manager, you're going to have to get really, really comfortable delivering it. A lot of it. And while it's a challenge to give tough feedback to anyone, it's particularly difficult when it's to an under-performing employee, or the one who grates on your last nerve. In short, in these situations, a bit of artistry is required.

Several years ago, I had an employee who wasn't exactly my favorite (yes, bosses have favorites). In an attempt to avoid getting snippy with her, I tended to distance myself from her whenever possible. And that worked pretty well—until she approached me to ask for a raise.

The fact that she had the stones to ask for a raise got me thinking the problems with her performance weren't just her fault—I was her manager, after all. It was my job to guide and support her until she earned that raise, and if I wasn't happy with her performance, I owed it to both of us to tell her.

It wasn't easy, but I did manage to deliver the feedback she needed to hear, while keeping things constructive and avoiding hard feelings. And you can, too.

### **Pretend She's Someone You Deeply Respect**

When you have to deliver some tough talk to a person you don't particularly care for or are already frustrated with, it's tricky to get the words right without sounding like a jerk. So, to help me keep the conversation both civil and fair, I imagined I was speaking to someone I really respected.

Why? Well, when dealing with someone you respect, you're usually careful with your words, and you're naturally super-conscious of how the other person might feel upon hearing your feedback.

For example, let's pretend you overhear a colleague, who's been your mentor and role model for years, give some terrible advice to an intern. You'd have to say something, right? But, would you just come right out and say, "Your advice was terrible!" Probably not.

Instead, you'd approach her with tact and humility, but you wouldn't sugar-coat it either—she can handle the truth, and deserves your honest opinion. And, so do your employees. Liking your staff is not in your job description, but mentoring them is. It's your job to guide them in the right direction, even if it's the last thing on earth you'd choose to be doing on a Tuesday morning.

### **Set the Stage**

Giving feedback can be an emotional process for both parties. Even if you've got your childhood idol in mind as you begin your speech, sentiment alone won't cut it. You need examples to share to illustrate your point.



Before your meeting, think back to a clear-cut, specific example of your employee doing whatever it is that drives you crazy or has been causing problems with her performance. But, try to pick something that could've happened with anyone on the team—you don't want her to get on the defensive before you make your point.

In my case, I chose an example of a habit that everyone on my team seemed to have on occasion, but happened to be one of this employee's biggest challenges. I described an incident in which she had promised a client she would resolve an issue right away, then proceeded to take off for lunch—without telling the team or her client she would be away.

I omitted all the damning facts, so she could imagine it happening to another employee—which naturally made her less defensive, and allowed our conversation to be based on real examples, without pointing fingers.

### **Turn the Tables**

Once you've set the stage with your example, it's time to put your employee in the driver's seat. It's empowering for anyone to be asked how she'd suggest a situation should be managed—and that's exactly how you want your employee to feel.

After describing the situation, I told my employee that I was finding it challenging to address the issue, and asked how she would handle the matter if she were managing the group. This opened up a discussion, which allowed both of us to share what worked and what didn't, all without throwing anyone under the bus.

Ideally, by the end of your discussion, your employee will have identified her own challenges, and have some suggested solutions she came up with on her own. You may have guided the conversation, but the advice will be hers, and that can be a motivating tool.

### **Give Her a Chance**

Whatever the backstory, you're an important player in your employee's career, and it's up to you to help position her for success. And part of that means giving her a chance to put her carefully crafted advice into practice.

After my discussion with my employee, I asked her to help me identify and resolve similar issues going forward. I highlighted the ideas of hers I liked best, and added a few of my own, until we both had designed a plan. But, asking her to just help me out wasn't enough. I wanted her to take ownership of the project, and be responsible for the outcome—and ideally, its success. So, I also charged her with presenting her findings to the group at the next team meeting.

By giving her a chance to take her own advice, and trusting her with the responsibility of representing the team, that feedback just might stick.

Being a manager can be incredibly fulfilling, and working through challenges—whether that's telling your least-favorite team member how her horrible fashion sense is killing the mood at conferences, or that her combative attitude with clients is making everyone's life difficult—will help you both take your careers to the next level.