

FIVE LEVELS OF CONFLICT

HOW TO MANAGE EACH ONE AT WORK



Not all workplace conflict looks the same. Some tension is easy to spot, while other times something just feels off. Knowing how to identify and respond to conflict early can prevent misunderstandings from growing into bigger problems.

	How you feel:	What to do:
Level 1: Discomfort	You sense that something isn't quite right. There's tension in the air, awkward interactions, or subtle changes in communication tone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pay attention to your instincts and recent interactions.Check in with the person informally.Ask open-ended questions to surface any concerns.
Level 2: Dispute	A direct exchange leaves you feeling upset, irritated, or frustrated. The focus shifts to who is right instead of solving the problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Take time to cool off before reacting.Clarify what was said versus what was heard.Keep the conversation focused on resolving the issue, not blaming the person.
Level 3: Disagreement	Debates become tense, feelings are guarded, and communication gets vague. Others may notice the tension but hesitate to get involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Schedule a direct conversation to discuss the issue.Use "I" statements to express your viewpoint without assigning blame.Encourage the other person to share their perspective.
Level 4: Escalation	People start taking sides, perspectives become distorted, and emotions are high. The relationship feels personal rather than professional.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Involve a neutral third party like a manager or mediator.Reframe the conflict as a shared challenge to solve.Focus on rebuilding trust and communication.
Level 5: Critical Turning Point	Conflict has fully escalated into crisis. Relationships may rupture, emotions become extreme, and the focus turns to winning rather than resolving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Seek formal intervention through HR, mediation, or professional conflict resolution support.Reflect on what resolution is realistic: repairing the relationship or moving forward separately.

QUICK TIPS FOR MANAGING WORKPLACE CONFLICT:

- Act early: Address discomfort before it turns into something bigger.
- Communicate openly: Use direct but respectful conversations to clarify misunderstandings.
- Stay solution-focused: Focus on the issue, not the person, to keep discussions productive.
- Seek help when needed: Don't hesitate to involve a manager, HR, or a neutral third party if tensions escalate.
- Know when it's critical: If conflict feels unmanageable, professional mediation or support can help reset the conversation.



These tips and insights are a great starting point, but handling conflict effectively takes practice. If you're ready to move beyond tips and build real confidence in managing workplace conflict, join us for **Responding to Conflict: Strategies for Improved Communication**.

This hands-on course provides tools, techniques, and guided practice to help you navigate challenging conversations and strengthen your communication skills.



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