

# How to Coach Clients to Manage Conflict More Effectively

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What causes conflict between people? Conflict develops when individuals have different opinions, ideas and thought processes and are not demonstrating an understanding of the other person's view, or perhaps are not willing to compromise with the other person.

Often conflicts and disagreements lead to a negative feeling, and often the issues are not resolved. If you are continually disagreeing or arguing with a co-worker or an individual in your personal life are you going to want to be around them?

The issues contributing to a conflict may be addressed, and worked with, to prevent the eruption of a larger conflict. Conflict management plays an important role everywhere, at work and even in our personal lives. Although people vary in their preference to deal with, or to avoid conflict, for most people arguing and fighting makes one's life miserable.

The ability to deal constructively with others and manage conflict when it arises helps increase our well-being – at work and in our personal lives.

Each of us possesses a series of conflict management tools that either assists, or degrades our ability to lead well or to have smooth relationships with others. Thankfully, we can constantly reevaluate the tools that are in our conflict management toolkit, and especially through coaching, can refine how we handle situations that would otherwise result in increased conflict or distress.

## HERE ARE SIGNS THAT YOUR CLIENT MAY HAVE POOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS:

- Generally avoids dealing with conflict

- May too frequently accommodate in order to just get along
- May get especially upset as a reaction to conflict, perceiving it as highly personal
- Cannot tolerate some conflict long enough to resolve it constructively
- Does not stand up for own interests and says yes too soon
- Gets into conflict by accident; doesn't see it coming
- Tendency to let things fester and not address the issues
- Waits too long for the right time and place to address issues
- Tries hard to win every dispute

## HERE ARE THE SIGNS THAT YOUR CLIENT IS SKILLED IN MANAGING CONFLICT:

- Steps up when conflicts arise—even seeing them as opportunities to make progress
- Listens well combined with good “reality assessment”
- Can help settle disagreements in a manner that people feel is equitable
- Is able to find common ground relatively easily

## CAN YOUR CLIENT OVERUSE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS? YES, THIS IS WHAT IT MAY LOOK LIKE:

- May be seen as overly assertive, perhaps aggressive
- May push for solutions before others feel ready
- May spend too much time dealing with conflict and in that way magnify the conflict
- May cut off open debate or brain storming to push to settle the issue



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## Coaching Questions to Help People Deal Constructively in Conflict Situations:

*“What can you do to show the other person you are interested in their needs?”*

*“How are you showing them your respect their perspective?”*

*“What can you do to give the other person what they want in a way that is ok for you?”*

*“What might you be doing that contributes to the conflict? In what way may you be using insensitive words, or raise your voice, or come across as critical or sarcastic?”*

*“What is the first thing you could do to have more constructively? What else could you do that would be helpful?”*

Listen to the other person. What are opportunities when you could say, “I see what you mean”, “I can see how it came across that way”, or other ways that you can let the other person know you are understanding their perspective even if you don’t completely agree with their view.

Help the person downsize the conflict to make it more manageable: “Would you tell me what is your specific concern?”

## CONCLUSION

Ideally we can help our clients see their development as a dynamic work in progress. There are several influences on one’s ability to successfully manage conflict and arrive at an effective course of action. We can help our client see that by being conscious of some potential areas of growth and committing to honest self-evaluation of current conflict management skills, people can become more refined in their skills to manage conflicts in their personal and work lives.

For more information see: FYI, For Your Improvement by M. Lombardo and R. Eichenger



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