



Managing Conflict Case

Please read before attending Workshop 3

Roberta has been at her office job for six months. She must prepare a monthly activity report that goes to the VPs and the CEO no later than the 15th of the month. It normally takes her three days to prepare this report after she collects all the necessary data from others in the organization. She routinely asks the others to submit this data to her on the 11th so that she has some wiggle room and can still meet her deadline. Most of the time, her system works well.

David is one of the persons who must provide the data to her. He is chronically late in getting it to her, but she has allowed him to be tardy so long as he gets it in on the 13th, mostly because she likes David and knows he is busy with other important things.

In June, Roberta has a special project due on the 14th and thus she has no margin for error to compile her monthly activity report. She will be working late nights all week to get both her regular report done on time AND the special project.

So Roberta visits David on the 10th and asks him, politely, can he get his data to her on the 11th this month? She explains her special project and how it takes away all of her margin for error on the activity report. Roberta is surprised to find that David is very unhappy, in fact angry to receive this request. To David, she is asking him to turn in his data 2 days earlier, but to Roberta, she is merely asking David to work towards the same deadline to which she holds others. Roberta is inwardly resentful that David doesn't seem to appreciate that she's been cutting him extra slack all along.

David says, in a loud voice, "Don't you know that I have work to do here as well? Life does not revolve around your silly monthly activity report! I'll get you your data when I always get it to you."

You are Roberta. How do you respond?



Five Ways to Address Conflict

- **Accommodation** - or "killing them with kindness." It is surrendering one's needs and wants for the satisfaction of another. This works well in courting situations of all kinds, whether customers, potential employers, or love interests. It is the strategy of choice when the relationship is the most important element.
- **Avoidance** -the flight part of "fight or flight." It is the process of ignoring or postponing conflict. This can be useful as a temporary measure but it never resolves the problem. Sometimes, however, there is no way to win and it is best to just cut your losses. As the song says, "You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em."
- **Collaboration** - the act of two or more people working together to achieve more than the sum of the individual parts. This is what people mean when they refer to "win/win". However it requires trust and open communication to work. Therefore, it is time and work intensive to achieve.
- **Compromise** - a quick dispute settlement process in which two or more sides agree to accept less than they originally wanted. This is also known as "split the difference." It is less than optimal as a resolution strategy because it requires each side to give up things that are important. It is a good backup strategy.
- **Competition** - the fight part of "fight or flight." It is the process of trying to do better than others or at others' expense. Sometimes, however, scarcity exists and survival of the fittest, strongest, etc. is the only way to go.
- These styles were first identified by Thomas and Kilman in 1976. You can download their Conflict Mode Instrument for free and learn more at
- [Thomas Kilman Inventory](#) Try taking it to determine your dominant style for addressing conflict. Remember each style is useful in its own context



Resolving Workplace Conflict Constructively

- **Define the actual causes of the conflict.** Find and enlist your adversary in finding, the real issues which are not necessarily the ones you are currently arguing about. Ask what are we fighting about? How can we work this out? What are we each trying to accomplish?
- **Validate differences in perception and point of view.** There are always 3 different truths in any argument, yours, mine and the actual truth. Neither of us can know "the whole truth and nothing but the truth," only our own perception. Validating and accepting your adversary's perception does not obligate you to share it. By doing so, you are inviting him or her to join in the resolution process.
- **Set up and get agreement for a process you both will work through.** Usually this involves each side having completely uninterrupted time (with an agreed upon limit) to express themselves about the conflict. Separate this from the process of seeking possible resolutions. People need to vent and be heard. Freed from the burden of unexpressed emotions they become available to generate and evaluate solutions.
- **Listen actively.** Habit 5 of Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People is "[S]eek first to understand, then to be understood." This means to listen with the intent to understand not respond. Communication is key to managing conflict and resolving problems. Feeling heard your adversary can now take the next step toward reconciliation.
- **Document the resolution and the plan of action** and provide copies to both sides. Documentation is important for a lot of reasons. One is that it provides each party with an agreed roadmap for implementation. It can also be crucial if the dispute later becomes a legal case.
- **Follow through then move on.**



10 Worst Ways to Handle Conflict

1. Avoidance of all conflict
2. Being defensive
3. Overgeneralizing
4. Being “right”
5. Mindreading /psychoanalyzing
6. Not listening
7. The Blame Game
8. “Winning” the argument
9. Character attacks
10. Stonewalling