
Workplace Conflict Resolution

***10 ways to manage employee conflict and
improve office communication, the workplace
environment and team productivity***

Special Report from:

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Workplace Conflict Resolution:

10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity

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Workplace Conflict Resolution:

10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity

Disputes between employees are inevitable. But if left unresolved, they can disrupt your department's productivity, sap morale and even cause some good employees to quit.

That's why **Business Management Daily** has prepared this "workplace survival" special report for managers, employees and HR professionals: **Workplace Conflict Resolution: 10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity.**

Learn how to resolve workplace conflict on everything from refereeing staff rivalries to dealing with a boss who's throwing more than just a temper tantrum to managing co-worker resentment when you get a promotion.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips

#1

The 5 common myths about workplace conflict



Managed correctly, conflict can be a positive source of innovation and creativity. Here are five myths about workplace conflict (plus tips on how to harness its power):

1. Conflict is always negative and should be avoided at work. Quite the contrary. When problems are hidden or masked, they aren't solved. They fester and grow into bigger problems. Conflict has to be acknowledged and addressed.

A big misconception about conflict is that it's a negative force. Workplace conflict is often creativity trying to happen, and savvy organizations look for ways to embrace and optimize conflict.

Employees close to the work often have great ideas for better solutions. Help them brainstorm these ideas, and then evaluate and prioritize them.

2. Difficult people are almost always the cause of conflict. While bad behavior is certainly a contributing cause of conflict, failing to set realistic expectations is a big

contributor. If people don't understand what the organization, their manager or their teammates expect, confusion and conflict can result.

Set expectations early, beginning with the job interview. Let people know what the job entails and what success in the role looks like.

3. The problem at the root of a conflict is usually obvious. Problem solving is central to managing conflict, but the problem can't be solved until it's identified. Getting to the source involves dialogue, conversations and some detective work.

There are a number of skills and techniques you have to employ: attending skills which put everyone on an even level; encouraging skills enabled others to elaborate; clarifying skills to reduce ambiguity; and reflecting skills to restate in your own words what you've heard the other person say.

4. In conflict, there are always winners and losers. A position is a stand we take in a negotiation or conflict. It is what we demand from the other person. Interests are what we really want—our needs, desires and concerns. When positions become the focus of the conflict, the problem can get covered up along with any solution. Focusing on interests, rather than positions is more effective. Think about your interest and then separate your position from your interest.

Also, consider the other person's perspective. Stand in their shoes and contemplate what they really want.

5. It's a manager's responsibility to fix problems on her team. Unless a problem involves behavior or performance that needs to be addressed, a manager doesn't necessarily own it—the employees do. When managers intervene and exert authority, employees miss the opportunity to develop their own conflict management skills. Employees need the freedom and authority to solve problems that relate to their work.

A guiding principle—in fact, a golden rule—of conflict resolution is that the problem should be solved by the individuals who own it.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips **#2**

Negotiating workplace conflict: 9 tips for managers

Conflict happens in all corners of the workplace. But if issues aren't settled, bad things can happen: Good people quit, morale can plummet, and sometimes violence can erupt.

But supervisors and managers don't need to become certified mediators to settle disputes. You just need to understand some basics about human behavior, practice the fine art of paying attention and offer yourself as a neutral party who wants to resolve the problem.

Here are nine insights and tricks of the trade, according to Jeffrey Kravis' book, *Improvisational Negotiation*:

1. Let people tell their story. When people are deeply upset about something, they *need* to get their story out. This is a basic principle of mediation and one that's important to remember.

Yes, allowing people to speak their minds *can* increase the level of conflict with which you must deal. That's OK. You have to get through the conflict phase to find the solution.

Sometimes, feeling that he or she is finally "been heard" can dramatically change an angry person's outlook. Plus, as the employee tells the story, new information may come to light that allows a solution to emerge naturally.

2. Bring a reality check to the table. Often in a conflict, the parties are so focused on minutiae that they lose sight of the big picture and its implications. As the mediator, you need to bring people back to reality by wrenching their attention away from the grain of sand and having them focus on the whole beach. Doing so may help resolution arrive at a startling speed.

3. Identify the true impediment. In every conflict, ask yourself: *What is the true motivating factor here? What is really keeping this person from agreeing to a solution?*

When you can identify the impediment, then you can predict how the person will respond to certain ideas, and you can shape negotiations accordingly.

4. Learn to "read minds." Mind-reading is not magic. It is a combination of observation and intuition, which is born of experience. You can learn a lot about how the parties see a dispute by paying attention to body language and listening closely not only to their words but also to the emotional tone behind their words.

5. Think creatively about ways people can cooperate rather than clash. In every negotiation, there's a tension between the desire to compete and the desire to cooperate.

Be on the lookout for signals that support a cooperative environment. That's where the most creative solutions are born.

6. Take the spotlight off someone who's refusing to budge. Isolation tends to create movement. When you mediate a multiparty conflict, you'll often discover that one person insists on taking a hard-line approach, refusing to compromise and shooting down every solution presented.

Suggestion: Take the attention off the "last man (or woman) standing" and begin settling around that person. You'll find that the holdout starts to anxiously call and send emails, trying to get things going again. When his or her perceived power is neutralized, the balky negotiator quickly sees the value of compromise.

7. “Edit the script” to help people see their situation in a different light. People tend to get stuck in their positions because they’re telling what happened from a narrow viewpoint and in a negative, hopeless tone. They *can’t* see the situation any other way unless you help them do so.

As the mediator, you can take a larger view that looks not at one party or the other “winning” but at both parties working toward a mutual goal. One way to do that is to *edit their script*. Retell their story about the dispute in a positive, forward-looking construction.

In that way, you literally give them the words to see their options in a new light.

8. Avoid the “winner’s curse” by carefully pacing negotiations. Believe it or not, it’s possible to reach a solution *too quickly*.

We all have an inner clock that lets us know how long a negotiation should take. When a deal seems too easy, a kind of buyer’s remorse can set in. One or both parties may be left feeling that if things had moved more slowly, they might have cut a better deal.

Don’t rush the dance or the negotiation will fail.

Even when you know you can wrap up things quickly, it’s to everyone’s advantage to keep the negotiation proceeding normally, for a reasonable amount of time, before the inevitable settlement.

9. Realize that every conflict can’t be solved. What if you’ve tried to help two warring factions find a fair solution, but you just can’t reach that elusive goal? That can happen—and often does. Not every negotiation will have a win/win outcome. Not everyone can live together in harmony. There are times when you just have to accept that both parties will leave the table equally unhappy. Isolate the participants if possible, and just move on.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips

#3

Team conflict resolution: Knowing when to referee

Suddenly the air is charged as you hear two employees arguing again. Today, one is accusing the other of fouling up the production schedule; yesterday, it was because a customer’s order went out a day late.

Enough is enough. The constant bickering disturbs other workers and upsets the department’s workflow.

Disputes between employees are common and inevitable. The difficult decision is when to step in, says Joseph F. Byrnes, professor of management at Bentley College's Graduate School in Waltham, Mass. "Give the warring parties a chance to resolve it on their own," he says. "The time to take action is when things get out of hand, and the problems are affecting their work or disrupting other people's work."

Find out if the conflict is work related and has a *structural root* or whether it's *interpersonal* and has no relationship to the job, Byrnes advises. An interpersonal conflict can happen on or off the job, whereas structural ones are inevitable in many organizations.

Advice: An easy way to evaluate the conflict, Byrnes says, is to ask yourself: "If you took these two people out of the situation and put two new people in, would you still have the conflict?" If the answer is yes, it's a structural conflict; if no, the cause is definitely interpersonal.

Structured conflicts can turn personal

Byrnes points out that structural conflicts can often turn interpersonal. After months—sometimes years—of battling, the two people concerned forget that there are actually systemic reasons for the conflict.

Managers can resolve both structural and interpersonal conflicts, Byrnes says, and often the techniques are not so different. To resolve a *structural* conflict:

■ **Expand resources.** You can often alleviate a workflow problem by changing the way jobs are scheduled or by providing more resources.

■ **Clarify job responsibilities.** Conflicts frequently arise when one department encroaches on another's domain. In engineering companies, for example, designers and engineers often have their differences. The designer creates a product on paper so that the engineer can create the actual product. Inevitably, problems arise when the two professionals work together to create the prototype. Each has his or her own ideas about how things should be done; hence, tempers often flare before solutions are found.

"The manager can step in and redefine who does what in the process and possibly act as a liaison between the two parties," Byrnes says.

Here are five techniques Byrnes suggests for dealing with either kind of conflict:

1. **Demand a truce.** Order the combatants to stop fighting and work out the problem themselves. If they're not successful, offer to step in and act as arbitrator. "They'll often welcome your stepping in because you're lifting the burden of solving the conflict from their shoulders," Byrnes says.
2. **Reduce interaction.** "Often, conflicts cool off when the two parties don't have to speak to each other throughout the day," he says. "If they're normally exchanging

- information all day long, suggest they meet less frequently, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. If they're constantly exchanging written information, for example, ask them to convey it through a neutral third party."
3. **Mediate.** Meet with the parties together. (If the issue is explosive, it might be better to meet with each one alone to gather facts.) Find out what the problem is, thrash it out and work together to find a solution. Talking it out can relieve pressure and often defuse the situation.
 4. **Keep emotions in check.** Interpersonal conflicts are not that straightforward, Byrnes cautions, because they're usually based on irrational differences. One worker, for example, may dislike a colleague because he thinks, feels or acts a certain way. "No matter what the reason behind the disagreement, make it clear that you don't have to like a person to work with him. As difficult as they may find it, they must learn to keep their emotions and feelings out of the workplace," Byrnes says.
 5. **Create common goals.** "Often, combatants—whether the cause is structural or interpersonal—fail to see the big picture," he says. "They concentrate on their particular jobs, which usually represent only one process or part of the company's goals. By reiterating the company's goals and demonstrating how both employees are vital to the company's success, you might temporarily squelch their anger and create harmony—or at least coexistence." Then everyone will be able to function effectively on the job.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips

#4

You may be a bully and not even know it

We all know what a big bully does: He yells, he threatens, he humiliates, he manipulates, he frightens. He's king of the workplace jungle, and he needs to constantly remind his employees. Or does he really need to remind himself?

He's at the red-orange end of the bullying spectrum and there's no going back. His ego is fed at his employees' expense. He knows it and he enjoys it.

But there are subtle ways a boss can bully his workers that are not so apparent to him or even his superiors. But the workers feel it. Those would be the little idiosyncrasies or habits that he picked up on his way to bossdom that begin to alienate his staff and chip away at morale.

Four things that make you monster lite, but nonetheless repulsive:

1. Your sarcasm has a nip to it. You think you're funny and witty with clever one-liners that distinguish you from your workers. After all, we all need a good laugh now and then. But the recipient of a sarcastic crack thinks you're treating him or her like an imbecile.

Sarcasm has no place in the workplace, especially from a boss who holds sway over others' livelihoods.

2. You're tougher on submissive employees. It's human nature: You're less likely to push, prod or pressure someone who has a bit of a backbone. So in order to flex your supervisory muscle, you're a little more demanding on the meek. It's easier to bark an order when you know you won't get any resistance. This act of who to pick on, who to leave alone doesn't need to be overt to be sensed by employees. They will catch on and see you as a coward—the cornerstone of a bully.

3. You have all the answers. The matriculation into management doesn't automatically give you unquestioning knowledge and foresight. In fact, there's more you need to learn, namely humility. It's an insecure boss—or a narcissistic one—who won't admit that he's stumped, that he doesn't have all the answers his employees seek. There's no quicker way to turn off your employees than by shooting down their ideas and suggestions because you know it all. The results are that employees will clam up in front of you, but will open up behind your back, criticizing your pompous ways.

4. You develop a “you're an idiot” chuckle. There's a certain forced laugh some bosses use before spewing their wisdom or points of view. For the boss, it may be just a habit, but the employee hears a dismissive, belittling chuckle that tells him or her that what you say after that should not be challenged.

Ditch these quirks fast if you recognize any in yourself. Employees don't deserve a bully. Even a mild one.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips #5

Don't be swayed by office politics

Let's assume that operating procedures are about to be changed to meet a new production schedule. Senior members of your staff favor one solution; the younger ones defend an alternate way. Either one could work.

Each faction is jockeying for power, each wants your support, and you are caught in the middle of office politics. How do you handle the situation?

As the manager, your approach should be to resolve the situation without offending or alienating either group. “Uppermost is not being seduced by the politics of one group over another,” clinical psychologist William Knaus says.

When politics get in the way, it's time to step in cautiously. "You don't want your boss to think that your division is riddled with divisive disputes," Knaus says. "Your credibility is on the line if you can't right the situation."

Easing tensions between warring factions isn't easy.

"A bad move on the manager's part could create irreparable barriers, decrease productivity, as well as dampen morale," Knaus says. "The situation must be carefully managed so that you're not taking sides."

Your goal is to keep everyone focused on solving a problem and not be sidetracked by personal or political issues. Sensitive handling involves:

■ **Recognizing different factions.** Managers must recognize and respect group differences so they remain objective and aren't sidetracked by petty conflicts.

"It's only natural that there will be differences of opinion among people with contrasting temperaments, abilities, responsibilities and work styles," Knaus says. "But you can't let these differences be a disruptive force."

■ **Being sensitive to people's needs.** "It's also important to understand that different people are motivated by different things," such as money, recognition or power, Knaus explains. Once you recognize those needs, you'll be better equipped to respond to different factions.

■ **Encouraging the factions to discuss their differences.** Set a time limit so disagreements can be resolved quickly. "The manager's job is not to prove anyone right or wrong. The objective is to establish a common ground between factions or seek an alternative that best meets the needs of the organization and both groups," Knaus says.

Advice: If an issue is unusually sensitive or complicated, Knaus suggests turning it over to an informed, impartial third party to mediate. This can be an expedient solution that will leave you in the clear and ensure objectivity.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips #6

6 steps for managing 'difficult' employees

Working alongside difficult people can be hard enough. But managing someone with whom you have a personality clash can cause major tension.

Experienced managers know how to separate emotions from the work at hand when dealing with employees. Rather than dwelling on an employee's negative personality

traits, smart managers focus on tasks, projects and results. They don't allow their personal feelings to interfere, and they treat everyone the same way.

But in too many cases, managers simply turn away from their least favorite employees. Rather than interacting with them, they avoid them. What's worse, managers may just write off the problem employees and do the employees' jobs themselves.

Turning your back on difficult employees isn't just a management mistake—it can also create legal trouble. That's because employees who frequently bump heads with management are also the ones most likely to file lawsuits when they feel they're being treated unfairly.

That's why, when confronted with employees who don't do what's asked, it's best to devise a strategy for making the best of a potentially explosive situation.

Although it may be hard to transform a difficult employee into a warm, friendly ally, you can take the following steps to make it easier for the employee to comply:

1. Confront problems head-on. If you don't like an employee, that person probably feels the same way about you. By clearing the air and calmly acknowledging any ill will, you can help the employee focus on getting the job done.

To level with the person, use phrases such as this: *"When I ask you to do something, I need to rely on you. I realize we're very different people, but we can't let that stop us from doing our jobs."*

2. Seek confirmation. When giving instructions, don't assume you're making yourself clear. Ask the employee to explain what you just said and what you expect of him or her.

3. Rehearse. Making simple requests is painless. But if you must explain something more complicated, don't wing it. You may waste time backtracking or jumbling words.

As you rehearse, use the fewest words possible to describe your goal. Boil down the expected outcome to its essential.

Once you find a concise way to summarize the outcome you want, write it down and memorize the key phrase that captures the main point.

4. Speak and write. To ensure the employee understands you, assign tasks both orally and in print. Get in the habit of talking with that person and telling him or her what you need. Let the employee ask questions and offer suggestions. Then, follow up soon after the discussion with an email or memo that summarizes what's expected, along with the timetable for the project.

5. Stick to behavior. When managing someone with an attitude problem, don't let the person's personality interfere with the job at hand. Focus on describing the work that you need done.

Avoid lacing your comments with any quips or cynical asides about the person's spotty track record on complying with your past requests. What you may view as a harmless jab ("Maybe you'll hit the deadline this time") may make the employee even more jaded and resistant to help.

6. Talk on the employee's turf. If you have a personality conflict with a certain employee, the last thing you should do is make him or her feel "bossed around" when you assign a task.

A practical way to encourage such employees to comply is to meet in their offices, not yours. Calling employees into your office to assign a task could instantly put them on the defensive.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips

#7

Read the clues when confronting a worker

Cornering an employee to address performance issues is an unpleasant but necessary part of your job. It is, in essence, a closed-door moment where you lay out the person's shortcomings, give him or her a chance to explain and then agree to a course of action.

Many times workers will try to B.S. their way through it because, well, they feel their jobs are on the line.

But in addition to listening to their words, pay close attention to their body language. Those clues are valuable. Here are some ways employees react when in confrontational situations, and how you can respond.

Silence. This worker is plugged into what you're saying, so don't mistake him for a dismissive stoic. There's a good chance he's afraid to say anything that might provoke some discipline. **Your response:** Carefully word your questions and comments to loosen him up. Once you get him to talk, assure him that you're there to help, not punish.

Tears. You're dealing with a fragile worker who was likely taken by surprise that she wasn't up to snuff. **Your response:** Be sympathetic, but don't join the pity party. Back off a bit until she composes herself. Tell her it's not the end of the world (and certainly not her job), and the two of you are meeting to correct things.

Laughter. Don't assume he thinks the whole thing is a joke. Often, people let out a nervous giggle as a defense mechanism; he's scared and concerned. **Your response:**

Never laugh with him. Remain serious and speak firmly, but don't overreact to his chuckles. He will stop once he senses your commitment to helping him recognize and correct his ways.

Anger. "Who? Me? You are *so* wrong." She is ready to jump out of her seat to defend herself; to let you know the whole meeting is unwarranted and you're off the mark. She doesn't feel she's responsible for the problem you've presented. **Your response:** Keep your cool, and she'll tone it down once you firmly explain in detail the problems she's caused. Focus on facts. With her, you can't be vague.

Apologies. His eyes are cast down, and he lifts them only to keep saying "I'm sorry." He appears humble and submissive and is probably hoping that his apologies will get him off the hook. **Your response:** Be wary of the sincerity. But as long as he's agreeing to the problem, focus on the solution and get a commitment from him to cooperate.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips

#8

Did he just say, 'That's not my job'?

It's the response that no boss likes to hear after asking (or telling) an employee to step up and do something that he or she doesn't normally do.

"That's not my job."

It's the ultimate punch in the manager's gut because it's taken as a direct affront to the boss's authority. You've been challenged. Undermined. Dissed. *Ouch!*

You: Jim, can you file those boxes of folders? Jean's been out for two days and we need to get those back into place.

Jim: That's not my job.

You: (speechless).

Before you unload on Jim about your unflinching role as the delegator-in-chief whose decisions, orders and do-as-I-say whims should not be questioned, think of why Jim or any other employee would spew that line in the first place.

Here are three reasons why Jim (or others like him) stood his shaky ground and drew a line in the office carpet:

1. You didn't make it abundantly clear when you reviewed his job description with him that his duties can and will include anything that you need him to do for the benefit of the team. Repeat: *for the benefit of the team*. This should be done early in the interview stage

and it should also be part of his annual review. It wouldn't hurt to drop reminders at staff meetings or during other one-on-one chats.

2. You tend to pick on Jim when you're looking for someone to fill in for an absentee or to pick up the workplace slack, perhaps just because you see him as an efficient, jack-of-all-tasks guy. Jim feels the sting of unfairness when he sees that you never cornered Jean to perform extra tasks. Somehow, she and a few others are exempt.

Take extra care to spread this out. Staff will quickly sense the inequity and label you as (a) uncaring; (b) out of touch; or (c) manipulative. Employees like Jim will call you on it.

3. If you're not guilty of No. 1 or No. 2, then you don't need Jim on the payroll. He's just not a good employee. He's insubordinate and a toxic component of your team. Such an attitude, if left unchecked, will suck the morale right out of your workplace.

It's also important that when you play shuffle-the-tasks with your workers that you reward them. Not in pay raises or bonuses. But show your appreciation. Give them fun assignments now and then. Take them to lunch. Let them cut out early.

"That's not my job" is a symptom of a deeper problem that you need to fix.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips **#9**

Is it them, or is it me? The problem co-worker quiz

This one's real simple to score—just circle every question to which you answer "False." Circle it again ... and then again ... and then one more time. And then take a moment to think...

- 1.** I know for a *fact* that my co-worker behaves in a way I know I never have or ever would.
- 2.** I know enough about my co-worker's home and personal life to be sure that *nothing* can explain the reason for their behavior.
- 3.** I'm *sure* my co-worker is the exact same aggravating person outside of the office as inside.
- 4.** I can't think of *anything* to talk about with my co-worker that we would have fun discussing.
- 5.** The time I spend being irritated and complaining about my co-worker is *worth it*.
- 6.** Just letting go of how I feel about my co-worker is *not* an option.

7. Other people feel more hostile toward my co-worker than I do—I'm *not* the #1 complainer.

8. I am confident that no one I work with has *any* complaints about me personally.

Workplace Conflict Resolution Tips

#10

Deep breath, then discipline right

"I'm not afraid of getting sued—that's the cost of doing business. I just want to make sure I get sued on my terms."

These are the words of speaker, author and HR executive Paul Falcone in discussing the importance of making your disciplinary records as thorough and true to the facts as you possibly can. And yes, your playbook needs a solid defensive scheme when it's time to issue that initial warning to an employee who has slipped.

However, Falcone believes there's also a human side to corrective actions that should not be overlooked. This is a chance for a healthy reset—one that can reflect well on the people in charge. When a chain of positive reviews is broken by a disciplinary action, the kind of employee you *want* to work for you will awaken to a good faith effort to correct his or her performance. If that awakening doesn't happen, then you've done all you can do, and you can be certain it's time for a necessary change.

Falcone offers some golden rules of thumb for preparing and carrying through with disciplinary actions:

1. Seldom will disciplinary transgressions be identical, so make sure you've created a realistic system that takes into account the many gray areas of human behavior.

The same transgression committed by two different people requires different handling depending on many factors. Be careful of blanket policies that sound strong on paper but collapse when they meet the actual range of personalities and problems in the workplace.

Your litmus test is this: How would you respond to this particular issue if your best-performing employee made the same error?

2. For progressive discipline to actually progress, there must be a link or nexus between events in order to move to a next stage. Otherwise, you'll end up with a series of first warnings rather than a progression of first, second and/or final written warnings. Falcone has seen companies develop vast bullet-pointed lists of unrelated infractions and penalties, when what they should be doing is making sure they've set down a short sequence of precise disciplinary steps, each containing some added element to impress

upon the employee a growing sense of urgency.

3. HR should always be present for those tense meetings for two reasons: first, to act as a witness, and second, to ensure the employee is treated with dignity and respect. A coolly logical HR presence is your best insurance that both parties will approach this situation as a mature deal: If *they* accomplish certain things, *you* will continue the working relationship. Otherwise, you agree to professionally walk away with no hard feelings. You never want this thought to flit even briefly through someone's mind: "*I can't believe they treated me this way.*"

4. It must be your goal to shift the responsibility for improvement away from the company and toward its employees. Don't make promises of training, counseling or corrective actions that you can't keep, and don't go too far out on a limb to suggest the company will go to extraordinary lengths to fix a worker's shortcomings.

Meet the employee halfway in the process, and make your company part of the solution. What courts want to sense, if it ever comes to that, is that you put forth your best effort for someone, but it just didn't work out because the employee didn't meet his or her end of a fair bargain.

Understand the difference between true conflicts and different communication styles

Remember, not every conflict is a battle to be fought. With an "equal opportunity" workplace, it is easy to forget that certain gender differences—as well as cultural differences—can still play underlying roles in office communications and perceived conflicts.

In her book, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Georgetown University professor of linguistics, Deborah Tannen notes, "To most women, conflict is a threat to connection...disputes are preferably settled without direct confrontation. But to many men, conflict is the necessary means by which status is negotiated, so it is to be accepted and may even be sought, embraced and enjoyed." Thus, it is easy to see how certain preferred male/female conversational styles can unintentionally offend the opposite gender. While it may seem at first that conflict is the opposite of rapport and affiliation; it is more complicated than that. Conflict may be valued as a way of creating involvement...and involvement can lead to a kind of bonding and ultimately benefit the entire team. For example, Tannen points out that, in general, many women like to talk in an inclusive manner that is meant to "build community." While many men prefer to speak in a "let's get to the point" manner to quickly address the problem at hand. Depending on the situation or task, one style can frustrate another, though parties using both styles share the same solution-minded goals.

Likewise, different cultural and geographical backgrounds can lead to miscommunication. Tannen advises that simply being aware of different communication styles—with neither being “right” or “wrong”—can help everyone accept those differences with good will.

Tannen also advises managers to be on the lookout for any “metamessages” workers are sending. For example, if a proposed solution involves asking one coworker to help another, this is probably framed as a positive. But to some, it can unintentionally send the negative metamessage, “She’s more competent than you,” or “He’s not working fast enough.”

Learning about style differences won’t make conflicts go away. But, Tannen concludes, “Having others understand *why* we talk and act as we do can protect us from the pain of their puzzlement and criticism.” Working together towards better understanding can banish mutual mystification and blame.

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Workplace Conflict Resolution: 10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity

Learn how to manage employee conflict and improve office communication and team productivity. Disputes between employees are inevitable...left unresolved, they can disrupt your department's productivity, sap morale and even cause some good employees to quit. Learn 6 steps for managing "difficult" employees, what to do when employees resent another's promotion, learn when and how to step in to referee disputes, and much more.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceConflictResolution

Maternity Leave Laws: 7 guidelines on pregnancy discrimination law, state maternity regulations, pregnancy disability leave, plus a sample maternity leave policy

It's important to know what you must do—and what you can't do (or say)—under federal anti-discrimination and maternity leave laws. And it's vital to double-check state maternity leave statutes, which may provide more liberal leave benefits. While no federal law requires you to provide paid maternity leave, most employers must comply with the pregnancy discrimination law and FMLA maternity leave regulations. Here are 7 guidelines on how best to comply with maternity leave laws, plus a sample leave policy you can adapt for your own organization.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/MaternityLeaveLaws

The Office Organizer: 10 tips on file organizing, clutter control, document management, business shredding policy, record retention guidelines and how to organize office emails

Learn how to keep your office operations running smoothly—and ward off chaos and legal trouble—with practical document management techniques for administrative professionals, office managers and HR professionals.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeOrganizer

Best-Practices Leadership: Team management tips and fun team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale

Learn new team management tips and team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale. Take our leadership assessment exercise to gauge your own performance as a team manager. See how businesses of all sizes are getting creative with team-building icebreakers and activities. Fight off team complacency with 5 strategies for making team-building exercises part of your daily routine.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/LeadershipTeamManagement

Employment Background Check Guidelines: Complying with the Fair Credit Reporting Act, conducting credit background checks and running a criminal check to avoid negligent-hiring lawsuits

Employment Background Check Guidelines shows employers and HR professionals how to properly conduct reference/background checks, select third-party background firms and why screening candidates online on social networking sites is legally risky business. Don't allow your organization to risk being held liable for "negligent hiring" or "failure to warn" should an employee turn violent on the job.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BackgroundCheckGuidelines

Salary Negotiating 101: 7 secrets to boosting career earnings, negotiating a raise and striking the best deal in a job offer negotiation

Think you deserve a raise, but are afraid to walk into your boss's office and ask? Don't let ineffective negotiation skills hold you back. Employees at all levels can boost their career earnings by following the rules on negotiating a raise, hashing out the best pay package in a job offer negotiation and knowing their market value.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/SalaryNegotiating101

FMLA Intermittent Leave: 5 guidelines to managing intermittent leave and curbing leave abuse under the new FMLA regulations

One of the biggest employer complaints about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the productivity problems caused by employees' use—and abuse—of FMLA intermittent leave. The problem: Employees with chronic health problems often take FMLA leave in short increments of an hour or less. The Department of Labor took steps to help minimize workplace disruptions due to unscheduled FMLA absences by saying that, in most cases, employees who take FMLA intermittent leave must follow their employers' call-in procedures for reporting an absence. Amend your organization's policies, update your employee handbook and revisit how you track FMLA intermittent leave with these 5 guidelines.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/FMLAIntermittentLeave

Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes

Employers, beware: The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division reports that wage-and-hour labor litigation continues to increase exponentially. Federal class actions brought under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) outnumber all other types of private class actions in employment-related cases. Use this special report, Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes, to review your overtime pay policy and double-check your FLSA exempt employees' status. Expecting a visit from a DOL auditor? Get prepared by taking the self-audit at the end of this report.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OvertimeLaborLaw

Office Communication Toolkit: 10 tips for managers on active listening skills, motivating employees, workplace productivity, employee retention strategies and change management techniques

A manager's job is 100 times easier and more rewarding when his or her employees are performing like a well-oiled machine. But when that machine runs slowly or breaks down entirely, a manager's job becomes exponentially harder. The best managers are the best listeners ... listen to our 10 tips and maximize office communication skills and bolster workplace productivity.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeCommunicationToolkit

Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit: HR advice, guidelines and policies to keep your workplace safe

Unfortunately, in the wake of a spate of workplace shootings, HR professionals and managers nationwide must consider the horrific possibility of violence erupting at their own facilities and events. To help employers prevent tragedy, this toolkit offers business advice, guidelines and policies aimed at keeping workplaces safe from employee violence. Learn prevention strategies, tips on identifying potentially violent workers, managerial advice on maintaining a safe workplace. It includes two sample anti-violence policies, adaptable for use in any company, plus checklists to use in case violence erupts.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceViolencePrevention

14 Tips on Business Etiquette: Setting a professional tone with co-workers, clients and customers

For organizations and employees alike, recognizing the critical link between business protocol and profit is key to your success. Learn how to confidently interact with colleagues in ways that make you and your whole organization shine. Discover best practices on making proper introductions; cubicle etiquette; “casual dress” rules; handshake protocol; guest etiquette; workplace behavior faux pas; business dining etiquette, office wedding invites and other co-worker special occasions; business letter and email protocol—and even how your office decorations may affect your professional image.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BusinessEtiquette101

12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program: Low-cost employee incentives, recognition programs and employee rewards

If you’ve had to cut pay and staff and now expect more from those who remain, it’s vital to revamp your employee recognition and rewards program. Employers can double their rewards and recognition efforts in innovative, cost-efficient ways with employee-of-the-month awards, employee incentive pay, employee appreciation luncheons, more time off, shopping sprees, wellness incentive contests, plus employee rewards customized to motivate Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers and the Matures. Now is the time to get clever with your employee recognition programs. This report shows you how with great ideas offered up from our [Business Management Daily](#) readers.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram

The Bully Boss Strikes Again! How to deal with bosses who make crazy requests

And you thought your boss was unreasonable? Bet he never asked you to perform oral surgery or fill in for the bomb squad. Talk about “other duties as assigned!” Even if your direct supervisor swamps you with petty tasks and doesn’t appreciate all you do, you can always “manage up” to make sure the boss’s boss knows your worth. This report includes practical advice on how to manage a toxic boss along with dozens of outrageous stories about bully bosses.

<http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BullyBoss>

Microsoft Email: Outlook Tips & Training: How to improve productivity by effectively employing under-used features already at your fingertips

We all use Outlook. It's easy. You can answer email, keep your appointments and your calendar, and save your files in various folders. But are you using it to manage your entire workflow? You can. Melissa P. Esquibel combines her 25+ years of experience in information technology with a background in training, technical writing and business risk analysis to move beyond email and help you understand Outlook's amazing workflow benefits. You'll discover how to get more out of Outlook than you ever dreamed possible with this hands-on road map to Outlook that can send your productivity skyrocketing.

<http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/MicrosoftEmailOutlook>

17 Team Building Ideas: The team building kit for managers with team building exercises, activities and games to build winning teams today!

With employees still reeling from workplace budget cuts, now's a great time for new team building ideas. No, you don't need an expensive round of paintball to gain the benefits of team building exercises, but you do need to squeeze the most out of them. This report provides teamwork examples, exercises and tips for leading winning teams. Go from being a manager who oversees people to a leader who molds them into winning teams with these 17 team building ideas.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/TeamBuildingIdeas

10 Time Management Tips: A how-to guide on efficiently managing your time through effective delegating, calendar management and using productivity tools

In this era of downsizing and the quest for efficiency, businesses of all sizes are asking employees to take on extra tasks to boost productivity. Has your job turned into one of those "stretch jobs"? If so, you may be looking for a better way to get more done in less time, reduce stress and stop burning the midnight oil. Read about calendar management, keyboard shortcuts, running productive meetings, setting up agenda templates and using tech tools for project management with these 10 time management tips. Learn to prioritize your tasks and stop working in a crisis mode all the time

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/TimeManagementTips

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