



3

EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Keeping the Peace on the Job

Starting Point

Go to www.wiley.com/college/Brounstein to assess your knowledge of the basics of effective conflict resolution.

Determine where you need to concentrate your effort.

What You'll Learn in This Chapter

- ▲ Four common approaches to resolving conflict situations
- ▲ How to apply the idea of respect in conflicts
- ▲ How to use assertive communication tools in conflict situations
- ▲ Steps of the resolving-concerns conflict-resolution model
- ▲ Steps of the needs-based model
- ▲ Ways of handling challenging reactions in conflicts

After Studying This Chapter, You'll Be Able To

- ▲ Discuss the relationship between constructive behaviors and conflict
- ▲ Identify the factors that distinguish the four approaches to conflict
- ▲ Describe communication tools that keep conflicts under control
- ▲ Discuss the merits of the describing, stating-thoughts, and stating-feelings tools
- ▲ Understand the purpose of entering into a conflict resolution with the appropriate plan

Goals and Outcomes

- ▲ Master the terminology, understand the procedures/perspectives, and recognize the tools of conflict resolution
- ▲ Understand the implications of respect, assertive communication tools, and conflict-resolution models
- ▲ Identify the main issues affecting decisions regarding conflict resolution
- ▲ Use tools and techniques to analyze parts of the conflict-resolution process
- ▲ Collaborate with others in using chapter material to evaluate conflict situations
- ▲ Apply resolution techniques to business conflicts
- ▲ Evaluate conflict-resolution strategies used in the real world

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are a part of life. Because much of your life takes place at work—as do many of your interactions—the workplace is an environment rife with conflict. Behaviors associated with a constructive approach to conflict are covered in this chapter. Four types of resolution approaches are detailed. Also explained is the value of using respect in all your interactions. Assertive communication tools that play a key role in conflict resolution are outlined. This chapter focuses on the importance of having a conflict-resolution plan, typically based on one of two resolution models. The chapter concludes with ways of handling particularly challenging reactions in conflicts.

3.1 Approaching Conflicts Constructively

A **conflict** is a problem in which two or more people have a difference of opinions, methods, goals, styles, values, and so on. These differences are a normal part of most workplaces, and tend to stir up conflict.

Conflicts within the workplace generally involve two issues—those about business concerns and those about working relationships—but they all involve people. Because people are the source of problems and the key to the solutions, interpersonal communications, from listening to speaking, play a major role in the course that conflicts take.

Before you can apply communication tools that help you deal effectively with conflicts, you must first be aware of the behaviors and communication efforts that make or break potential conflict situations.

In other words, whether the outcome you get out of a conflict situation is positive or negative is greatly determined by the approach you take. When your approach sends you down a destructive path, the likelihood of arriving at a good resolution is slim to none. When your approach sends you on a constructive path, you increase the likelihood of achieving positive results. You're in control; you decide which path you take.

3.1.1 Knowing What Not to Do in Conflict Situations

Being aware of what not to do is an integral part of figuring out how best to resolve conflicts. The list of behaviors in this section put you on the destructive track; they make conflicts much more difficult to deal with and resolve. If you're like most people, you've probably had some experience with these behaviors: doing and receiving them.

- ▲ Yelling
- ▲ Blaming

- ▲ Reacting defensively
- ▲ Making negative assumptions
- ▲ Not dealing with the situation
- ▲ Making subtle digs and sarcastic remarks
- ▲ Making personal insults
- ▲ Complaining constantly about the situation
- ▲ Issuing ultimatums
- ▲ Arguing or pushing harder and harder for your way
- ▲ Sending negative e-mail messages
- ▲ Going to others rather than the source

These behaviors do nothing to work out resolutions in conflict situations. Instead, they escalate tensions, strain working relationships, prevent important improvements from happening, and destroy communication and information sharing.

3.1.2 Taking the Path to Success

This section shows how to approach conflict situations constructively rather than destructively. Certain skills are necessary in implementing these behaviors (see the following sections of this chapter), but you first must know and incorporate the essential constructive behaviors into your approach so those tools can work.

- ▲ **Go to the source.** No invention can ever take the place of face-to-face interactions for resolving disputes and conflicts. People need to meet directly, the old-fashioned way, and use conversation to settle their differences.
- ▲ **Stay in control.** The toughest person you have to manage in interactions is yourself. When you're in control of your own emotions, you're better able to influence the direction of a conversation toward achieving a positive outcome.

FOR EXAMPLE

The Blame Game

Don was working with Sue on a critical assignment for a class project and presentation. As the deadline approached, Don realized that an important element had not been completed; when he confronted Sue, she said that he was responsible for it. Somehow, each thought the other was responsible for the task. Instead of accepting it as a miscommunication and figuring out a way they could meet the deadline together, Don fired off an e-mail blaming Sue—making matters even worse by copying the e-mail to their professor.

- ▲ **Stay focused on issues.** This action is related to staying in control. Your opponent may exhibit destructive behaviors that can distract your attention from the issues. The key is to focus on the issues, not on your or the listener's personal opinions.
- ▲ **Actively listen.** Sections 2.4.4. and 2.4.5 explain how to listen actively in your interactions. In conflict situations, your ability to listen to and understand where the other person is coming from is critical in achieving positive outcomes.
- ▲ **Be straight and sincere.** People sometimes worry so much about being nice to others that they can't be clear and honest when they attempt to address their concerns. Conflict situations are simply about working out issues and differences to make positive results. Save being nice for social situations.
- ▲ **Go for solutions.** When you're dealing with problems or conflicts, you want to be **solutions oriented** so that your end result creates an improvement, corrects an error, or makes things better than they were in their previous state.
- ▲ **Assume the other person means well.** Section 1.2 touches on the many problems that assumptions can cause: They often lead you to think and act negatively in your interactions. Rather than worry about what you *think* is the meaning of someone causing you concern, you can deal with the actions and issues and focus on solutions.



SELF-CHECK

- Define **conflict**.
- Describe what to do and what *not* to do in conflict situations.
- Discuss the role of active listening in a conflict resolution.
- Explain how being solutions-oriented affects a conflict situation.

3.2 Handling Conflicts: The Four Approaches

People use four common approaches to express their messages to others—aggressive, nonassertive, passive-aggressive, and assertive (see Sections 1.1.2 and 2.1). Because most people aren't ever taught to constructively express messages or to constructively listen, many find it difficult to handle stressful and challenging situations such as conflicts in positive ways.

This section contrasts the four common approaches to resolving conflict situations and shows you how the assertive approach offers you the best choice for dealing with the potentially challenging workplace conflicts you'll face: those that involve business issues and those that involve working relationships.

3.2.1 The Aggressive Approach

The **aggressive approach** is hard charging, is often interpreted as hostile in manner, and is one in which you come across as seeking to control or dominate. In conflict situations, you don't back down; in fact, you go on the attack. The conflict is a competition to be won.

If you're in aggressive mode during a conflict situation, you're likely to do several of the following:

- ▲ **You blame.** Finger-pointing and finding fault with others for the concern or problem dominate the interaction. When you're on the receiving end of this behavior, you may want to say, "I got my head bitten off" by so-and-so.
- ▲ **You interrupt and talk over.** Using the aggressive approach often leads to an argument or debate as you become a combatant, getting louder, preventing the other person from getting a word in—all behaviors that tend to escalate tensions.
- ▲ **You push to get your way.** Compromising and listening to the other person's point of view? No way! The way to resolve the conflict is by pushing harder for your own view, being unyielding, and verbally browbeating the other person to get your way.
- ▲ **You demand and order.** With this behavior, your solution is telling the other person what to do. Directives that sound like orders usually are stated loudly and harshly—characterized by comments like, "What you need to do is . . ."

Quite often, in the aggressive approach, all four of these behaviors come together at once. The aggressive approach doesn't focus on solutions; nor does it seek to build agreements that both parties can feel good about. Instead, it invites defensiveness and resistance—not ingredients for resolving conflicts.

3.2.2 The Nonassertive Approach

With the **nonassertive approach**, you maintain a passive manner and do not express your rights or views. You let others dominate or control the situation, even if it doesn't result in a positive outcome for you.

When you fall into the nonassertive approach, conflicts are situations that breed great discomfort, and your comfort zone, not the issue at hand, becomes the

focus of the situation. Here are actions common to the nonassertive approach to conflict situations:

- ▲ **You avoid conflict.** Because such situations often create a great feeling of discomfort, they are commonly avoided even when the problem gets worse. A lot of reasons, which usually sound like excuses, are given for not dealing with the concern.
- ▲ **You appease the other person.** In this action, you give in to the other person's demands just to go along and keep the peace—even if those demands aren't in your best interests. Those who take an aggressive approach in conflict love dealing with individuals who take a nonassertive approach.
- ▲ **You become hesitant and apologetic.** You sound uncertain and say a few "I'm sorry" comments along the way, because you don't want to hurt the other person's feelings. All this hesitancy, however, communicates a lack of confidence and importance in your messages and, not surprisingly, you're not taken seriously.
- ▲ **You ramble and beat around the bush.** The problem with rambling is that the message has no focus; the problem with beating around the bush is that points of discussion are indirect and implied at best. As a result, nothing gets resolved and the other person walks away thinking there's been much ado about nothing.

More often than not, in the nonassertive approach to conflicts, an avoidance behavior emerges. The other common behaviors are reactions to challenging situations and usually appear when conflicts are thrust upon you. Taking the initiative to get an issue of concern addressed seldom shows itself in the nonassertive approach.

3.2.3 The Passive-Aggressive Approach

With the **passive-aggressive approach**, your communications and actions come across as subtle, yet negative, and implied, while manipulative. With the passive-aggressive approach, what appears quiet on the outside has underlying it (on the inside) actions that others receive as hurtful or deceitful.

Here are common actions that the passive-aggressive approach displays in conflict situations:

- ▲ **You tell others, not the source.** This is the classic passive-aggressive behavior in conflicts. You engage in behind-the-scenes complaints about the source of the concern, telling everyone except that source. Such actions often stir much gossip, create negative energy around an office, and can become quite disruptive.
- ▲ **You withhold.** In this passive-aggressive behavior, you refuse to cooperate. You don't pass on information that the other party can use or give assistance

that is helpful. You give the source of your concern the silent treatment and refuse to talk to him or her.

- ▲ **You make subtle to not-so-subtle critical remarks.** Sometimes you display this behavior through little put-downs or sarcasm. Sometimes you make openly critical remarks in group situations about something someone else has done; you may also hide behind e-mail messages. In all cases, the subject of your remarks feels the criticism and experiences a lack of direct and constructive communication.
- ▲ **You hold in for awhile, and then unload.** This behavior is the aggressive side of passive-aggressive. If you're the recipient of this behavior, nothing visible is displayed for awhile about concerns with what you've been doing. Then one day the person verbally explodes with pent-up woes and lashes out with personal attacks. You may get an apology later, but you're sure they still think everything was your fault.

In the passive-aggressive approach, people shy away from addressing issues directly and constructively but are not shy about showing their negative emotions.

3.2.4 The Assertive Approach

When using the **assertive approach**, you express your rights and views in a positive and confident manner, and enable others to do the same with the intent and effort to work out resolutions. If you need to address an issue of concern, you'll tackle it but do so respectfully so that you promote two-way communication.

When using the assertive approach, here are the common actions you can take in conflict situations:

- ▲ **Go to the source.** In the assertive approach, you go to the other person with whom you have your difference to open up dialogue—not through e-mail, not through voice mail, not through a messenger. This action takes place one-on-one and privately.
- ▲ **Be direct and constructive in language and tone.** Assertive people don't shy away from expressing problems and describing them as they see them. But language and tone are to the point and tactful (the opposite of being blunt) and focused on the issue—the *actions* of the other person, not directed at the *person*.
- ▲ **Collaboratively problem solve.** The problem is stated but the emphasis from that point forward is to dwell on solutions (not on problems) and to work through the issues together as partners (not adversaries).
- ▲ **Stay firm yet willing to compromise.** Being firm means being strong in your convictions and confident in your manner, but not harsh in your tone or language. Your views and the other person's views are looked at together, along with what's good for the job at hand.

When you're using the assertive approach, you're willing to deal with conflict situations regardless of the comfort level you feel. Emphasis is placed on working through the issue with the other person and, more important, to work out solutions. Treating others with respect and problem solving with them are expected—and that's the assertive approach, the most effective in tackling conflict situations.

3.2.5 Using the Assertive—and Best—Approach

Being assertive takes the most constructive stance in dealing with conflict situations. A big part of handling conflicts assertively is exercising judgment and choosing the best course of action for dealing with an issue.

Here are three descriptions of when assertiveness works best in conflict situations:

- ▲ **Dealing with the matter now:** Sometimes, as the expression goes, no time is better than the present. Addressing the concern right away with the other party is better for turning the problem around and preventing it from building up and becoming a bigger problem. You feel in control of yourself and your emphasis is on resolving the conflict. You're also in a setting, or can create one right away, in which you and the other party can talk privately in a one-to-one interaction.
- ▲ **Dealing with the matter at a later time soon:** You know you have a problem you need to address, but now isn't the best time to do so. If you can't address a conflict right away, set a time to meet with the other party while the issue is still fresh. Delaying for a brief time can be helpful because you have time to prepare.

FOR EXAMPLE

When Later Is Better

Stacy had just seen the final copy of the brochure that her company had printed for the city's winter festival weekend. In it, the brochure outlined the times and locations for nearly 30 different events and activities. Because Al, her assistant, had proved himself on his last five assignments, Stacy had given him the job of proofing the brochure before shipping it out. The brochure looked great, until the last page, which listed an event from the previous year. Al had probably let his guard down or become distracted by the end of his task and missed the mistake. Stacy, who had already dealt with two other contentious work issues that morning, decided to wait until after lunch to deal with this one. She simply sent Al an e-mail asking him to bring his materials with him to meet with her at 2:00.

- ▲ **Leaving the matter alone:** This third option works only when the matter at hand isn't really that important. Assertiveness isn't about addressing everything that bothers you. It is about picking and choosing your issues.

SELF-CHECK

- Define the following approaches to conflict: **aggressive**, **nonassertive**, **passive-aggressive**, and **assertive**.
- Describe typical reactions to the four conflict-resolution approaches.
- Discuss the negative effects of the passive-aggressive approach.
- Explain why the assertive approach is the most effective.

SHOULD YOU TALK ABOUT THIS NOW?

When using the assertive approach to handle conflicts, you evaluate the best course of action to take before you act. That is, you think before you speak. Use the following checklist when deciding if you're ready to handle a conflict:

- ✓ **Are you in control?** When you're in control of your own emotions, you're in position to constructively deal with, and not be deterred by, someone's strong emotions.
- ✓ **Are you prepared?** The bigger the issue, the more prepared you should be. Get your thoughts in order, set your objective, and outline how you'll manage the meeting.
- ✓ **Is the other person ready?** People address problems better when they're calm, not stressed or emotional. For those people that never appear calm, choose the moment closest to when this can occur.
- ✓ **What impact is the problem having (or will have)?** The greater the negative impact of a problem or conflict, the greater the need to address it sooner rather than later.
- ✓ **Can you get over this?** If the issue you've attempted to put aside keeps gnawing at you, it probably needs to be addressed. Not doing so is a nonassertive approach.
- ✓ **Is this a good time?** Avoid situations with tight deadlines or heated arguments. Catch people at quieter times of day or set an appointment for a time that will work.

3.3 Respect: The Key to Becoming Assertive

You can build foundations that make assertive approaches to future conflict situations possible and effective. Such foundations serve as a basis for the way you approach working relationships that you create with staff members, peers, managers, customers, and vendors—everybody that you frequently to occasionally work with.

This approach is called being **consistently respectful**. When you have it working, you're in position to handle any conflict that confronts you and thus keep the molehills from turning into volcanoes.

Being consistently respectful relies on the following two points about how you interact and work with others:

- ▲ I should do those actions that are good for me, considerate of you, and good for the relationship overall and the job we have to do—regardless of whether you reciprocate.
- ▲ My approach is to be constructive in all interactions and focus on getting the job done well—regardless of whether I like you personally.

The *regardless* parts of this definition are aspects that give many people the most trouble. Who can argue with a constant desire to have consistently respectful working relationships? But others sometimes act or behave in ways that make it hard to maintain a constructive relationship with them. That's the challenge of being consistently respectful, but that's what makes it so powerful.

Being consistently respectful is not about putting conditions on working relationships, such as "I'm going to help you only if you help me." It isn't about deciding to treat with respect only those whom you like or with whom you get along. It also isn't about avoiding issues of concern because you're afraid of how the other person may react.

Being consistently respectful means working out issues as best as possible for the parties involved, while maintaining the dignity of the relationship. This means dealing with issues, but doing so in a respectful manner with a focus on the job to be done.

3.3.1 Applying the Keys to Being Consistently Respectful

Being consistently respectful paves the way to a strong foundation for tackling issues and especially conflicts with others. The following key principles make this approach to relationships work in your day-to-day interactions on the job:

- ▲ **Operating collaboratively:** This means people you interact with are viewed as partners, not adversaries. They don't have to become your friends, but they aren't your enemies whenever you have a disagreement. It also means that you work with, rather than against, others in a cooperative manner to get the job done.

FOR EXAMPLE

Treating All Customers Alike

Will is a salesperson at a local car dealership. Every couple of months his boss offers free incentives (coolers, umbrellas, radios, etc.) to customers who come in to test drive new models. The majority of these customers won't ever buy a car, but Will knows that he must treat them all the same, as if they will earn him a commission some day.

- ▲ **Working to understand others:** This means making as much of an effort to understand where someone else is coming from as you do when you're letting the other person know your own point of view. It means actively listening so that you can show a true understanding what others have to say, especially in conflict situations.
- ▲ **Building relationships for the long term:** Remember the advice not to burn your bridges? In brief, don't do things that hurt or disrespect others, because you're likely to run into those people again. Treating them with respect makes your job easier and builds allies for you today and in the future.
- ▲ **Fixing problems rather than blaming:** Recognize that people are a part of every problem. Blaming them for problems solves nothing but creates animosity and distrust. Working with others to solve problems is the best way to get solutions that work.

3.3.2 The Benefits of Being Consistently Respectful

We're all human, and humans make mistakes. But when you deal with others in a consistently respectful fashion, you build trust with them and they're more forgiving of your occasional mistakes. And when problems come up, they're more willing to resolve these problems with you in an emotionally controlled manner.

In fact, conflicts can then be dealt with in manageable sizes and kept on the constructive track. Best of all, conflicts don't have to be terrible and tense; they can even have positive benefits, including the following:

- ▲ **Sparking creativity:** Good conflict resolution explores ideas and options for making something better, challenges the status quo, and enables you to listen to others' perspectives to reach outcomes—great endeavors for stimulating creative thinking.
- ▲ **Opening lines of communication:** When people deal with conflicts constructively, they're talking face-to-face about the issues and maintaining

respect while doing so. Such behavior does wonders for enhancing communication.

- ▲ **Building teamwork:** In the consistently respectful approach, people are pulled together to work through conflicts. They must collaborate to reach resolutions.
- ▲ **Making things work better:** The ultimate focus when you constructively deal with conflicts is on reaching solutions. When you collaboratively fix problems, as opposed to fixing the blame, you make a situation work better than it did before.

You can thrive on conflict. Conflicts can have a positive connotation, especially when you use an assertive approach and build working relationships to be consistently respectful as you resolve them.

SELF-CHECK

- Define consistently respectful.
- Describe ways of being consistently respectful.
- Discuss key benefits of treating others with respect.

3.4 Communicating to Keep Conflicts under Control

Successfully resolving conflicts at work starts with taking a constructive approach to them. In particular, you want to take actions that are assertive: Go to the source, listen, focus on the issue, state your views directly and sincerely, and collaboratively come up with solutions. Quite often, however, this is easier said than done. Assertive action doesn't just happen because you want it to happen. It requires skill.

In order to take an assertive approach you must apply assertive communication tools. This section reinforces the active listening and assertive speaking tools discussed in 2.1.4 and 2.4.4 and explains how to apply them in conflict situations. It also adds a few more tools to your toolbox that help keep conflicts on the constructive track.

3.4.1 Getting Started on the Right Foot

You need to start your discussions on a positive track when you address conflicts or concerns with others. Introductions are important for managing discussions involving conflicts, especially when emotions run high. Regretfully, people quite often skip this critical step.

People have intentions and they have actions. But you can see only someone's actions. Of course, people make assumptions—usually negative ones—about someone's intentions, but the truth is, intentions are invisible. When you address concerns with others, you want to express a *positive intention* as part of a strong opening statement before you get into the specifics of your issue. A **positive intention** is a statement that says you mean well. It tells the other person in your conversation that the discussion and actions that follow are meant to be good. A positive intention is one of the most important tools to have in resolving conflicts.

Here's an example of a statement of positive intention, one that won't be easy to argue with or get defensive about:

George, as we address this issue today, I want you to know my whole focus here is on helping us clear the air and getting back on track toward having a working relationship in which we support one another.

A good statement of positive intention meets the following criteria:

- ▲ It's usually said in one sentence. Rambling messages tend to lose their impact.
- ▲ It's said in a sincere tone. Without sincerity, your statement has negative intentions.
- ▲ It's stated in positive language, and it avoids words such as *but* or *not*.
- ▲ It defines the positive outcome you're seeking.

You can use one of two types of positive intentions, or you may even want to use both. One type of positive intention is your own; the other type is the one you state for the other person.

As you can see in the *my* emphasis of the following type of positive intention, you *own* the statement. Words like *I*, *me*, *my*, or *mine* show you have possession of the message. It is coming from your perspective:

Sue, my emphasis with you today is on working out solutions that help us do our jobs well.

Here is an example of a positive intention you give to the other party:

Sue, one thing I want you to know is that I greatly appreciate the passion you bring to your work and regardless of what we come up with, I want to see that continue for you.

In this second type of positive intention, the emphasis is on the other person. Its intent is to communicate your respect for the other person and acknowledge your understanding of his or her good intentions. The conflict to be worked out can, therefore, be more about the issue on which you differ than on the people who are involved.

3.4.2 Setting an Agenda

In addition to setting a positive tone, you want to establish a structure for the meeting so that it doesn't wander aimlessly. Conflict discussions without organization are less likely to reach a resolution. To set a good structure when you initiate a conflict resolution meeting, do the following:

- ▲ **State that you have an issue.** Let the other person know you have an important matter to address. Do this right at the start and do it in one sentence. It is a general statement that either names the overall subject you want to discuss (“Sue, I want to discuss some challenges I see happening with our ABC project.”) or simply states that you have an issue of concern that you want to address with the other person.
- ▲ **State your positive intention.** Make sure your listener is aware that you mean well by stating your own positive intention, by stating the positive intention of the other person, or by stating both if necessary. (See Section 3.4.1.)
- ▲ **Outline your agenda.** Another good thing to do when setting the structure for your meeting is to briefly highlight your agenda. The agenda outlines the flow of your meeting. When you do it right, it describes the problem-solving process you're going to use to guide the discussion. For example:

Sue, in our meeting today, I want to first share with you my concerns about what's been happening recently and then hear your point of view. From there, I want us to brainstorm ideas of how we can make things work better, evaluate which of those ideas will be mutually beneficial, and then close by finalizing our plan and even setting a follow-up time to review our progress.

No matter what problem-solving process you choose to follow in the meeting (two models will be covered later in this chapter), this is the kind of introduction you want to have for initiating conflict-resolution discussions. It gives you an organized flow with a constructive tone—a winning combination for getting started on the right foot.

3.4.3 Showing Understanding: A Tool for Success

When a conflict situation generates an especially high degree of emotion, both parties spend a lot of energy trying to outtalk each other. As the great debate ensues, you end up with two or more people sometimes vehemently talking and no one really listening. The more the tension rises, the further you get from reaching any kind of solution.

Being an active listener isn't always easy because conflict situations can spark a high degree of emotion. The tool that helps you listen actively is referred to as **shifting and showing understanding**. The following sections explain what the tool means and how to use it in conflict situations.

FOR EXAMPLE

Shifting the Approach

To prepare for a campaign celebrating the 50th anniversary of one of their products, Jill, a marketing project manager, was able to get help from Scott, a member of another team. At first he'd been a big help. But in the last week or so, she'd seen his productivity and morale dip. When she tried to address this concern, he snapped, "I was asked to help you out nearly a month ago. But, you keep asking me to do more. You know, I've got other work to do." The project manager's reply showed that she understood what he was feeling: "Scott, you're feeling upset because you see this arrangement turning out quite different from what you understood it would be. Is that right?"

Shifting and showing understanding includes two main efforts:

- ▲ Shifting your attention off of your own message and onto capturing the other person's message
- ▲ Responding by showing understanding of the other person's message before continuing any efforts to express your own views

This shifting of your attention from your own message to that of the other person brings your emotions under control when you see the tensions rising in a discussion—whether in a conflict or everyday situation. When you're in control of your own emotions, you increase the likelihood of influencing the other person to control his or hers.

3.4.4 Shifting into Gear: Making Shift and Show Understanding Work

To make shifting and showing understanding work, follow these key steps:

- ▲ **Mentally focus your attention on the speaker.** Stop speaking and put your attention into capturing what the other person is saying. (Try mentally saying the word "shift" just as a reminder to listen.) Then focus on the meaning of the message.
- ▲ **Give verbal feedback to show understanding.** After you get a sense of what the message means, paraphrase or reflective paraphrase what the speaker has said to you.

Paraphrasing and *reflective paraphrasing* are two important tools of active listening.

- ▲ **Paraphrasing:** Restating the main idea of a speaker's message to verify or clarify your understanding of the facts or content of that message.
- ▲ **Reflective paraphrasing:** Identifying the emotion and the meaning of a message and summarizing it in your own words.

Through your own words and observations, generally in one sentence, they help you show understanding of the message you've heard.

- ▲ **Gain confirmation or clarification of your verbal feedback.** Invite a direct response from the other person to find out if you're hearing the message correctly. To let your speaker know you need a response, you can raise your sentence-ending tone to make your feedback message sound like a question or simply ask, "Is that correct?"
- ▲ **Ask questions when you need more information to understand the message.** Before you can provide verbal feedback to check your understanding, you sometimes need to get more out of the message. You may also need to get more information to further understand why the person thinks or feels the way he or she does.
- ▲ **Stay nonjudgmental.** When you're looking to show understanding of the other person's message, your role is not to interpret it but to understand it as that person meant it. Likewise, avoid judging the speaker's view as right or wrong; it is merely *different* than yours, which is why you're having a conflict. You don't have to agree with it—just understand it.
- ▲ **State your view as needed or just move forward.** When you've shown that you understand the other person's message, you then have the opportunity to get your point across next in the conversation. Sometimes you can simply move forward into the solution stage of the discussion.

In conflict situations, you don't have to agree with the other person's viewpoint and feelings, but you do need to understand them. Doing so will lead you in the right direction: toward a solution.

3.4.5 Telling It Like It Is: The Describing Tool

A big part of a police officer's job is writing reports about the incidents he or she deals with while on duty. The best officers write reports that cover just the facts. You can read such a report of an incident and see the scene in your mind as if you were watching it on videotape. That's the idea of the *describing tool*. **Describing** is reporting behaviors that someone displays in observable and objective terms. It's telling what you see, not giving your opinions about what you see. It's telling what someone has done, not stating your assumptions about the person's motives.

To clearly understand what describing means, keep the following points in mind:

- ▲ **Behavior, not attitude:** Describing focuses on behaviors but not on attitudes. Behavior involves someone's actions—you can see them and hear them. Attitude, on the other hand, is how someone thinks or feels about something. You can't see them; they're locked away in the individual's mind. Certainly, attitudes influence behavior, yet they aren't the same. In fact, a person can have a lousy attitude about an issue but still manage to keep it in check by displaying respectful behaviors in any interaction.
- ▲ **Substance, not generalities:** Describing, sometimes referred to as **constructive feedback**, is providing substance to your message so the stated observations are clear and concrete. Sometimes, people comment on your behavior in general terms. For example, "You were not constructive at the team meeting today." In this case, the receiver of this message didn't get a clear picture of what was done badly.

When describing, the receiver gets a clear picture of what you saw in that person's behavior. Here is an example of describing:

As I facilitated today's team meeting, I was concerned about the behaviors you displayed that were different from your usual positive participation. On three occasions, I noticed you interrupted other team members before they were done expressing their points. On one of those occasions, I heard your voice get loud and you told Joe that his idea to solve the shipping delays was "a waste of time." What I saw happen for the rest of the meeting was that you sat quietly, had your arms folded, kept your chin down, and gave no response when asked for your thoughts to help on other ideas.

As you can see, describing gives you a clear, specific and concrete picture of the events that took place as if you were watching them again on videotape. In conflict situations, describing is an important skill for expressing the concerns you have about what someone else is doing. Describing is much better than general criticism.

Here are guidelines to follow when describing:

- ▲ **Focus on the issue and use I-messages to help.** *I-messages* have you owning your observations. They help you focus on what the person did, the actions that have been seen, the issues, and not the person. *I-messages* are phrases such as the following:

I've noticed . . .

I've observed . . .

I've seen . . .

- ▲ **Give specifics.** Without specifics, you end up with a description of general praise or criticism. Examples and quotes give your descriptions substance.
- ▲ **Report observations, not interpretations.** Knowing the difference between observations and interpretations is key to effectively using describing when dealing with behaviors. An observation is what you have seen. An interpretation is what you think or feel about what has been seen. Take a look at these examples:
 - **Interpretation:** “I noticed you were in a bad mood at today’s meeting.”
 - **Observation:** “I noticed you sat quietly and said nothing at today’s meeting and even when asked a question, you replied with a one-word answer.”
- ▲ **Be direct.** Don’t beat around the bush, ramble, or talk around a point. Such forms of communication cause confusion and apprehension. In describing, being straightforward—without being blunt or aggressive—is the most effective way to make a message clear to someone else.
- ▲ **Show sincerity in your tone and language.** In addressing conflicts or concerns, a level of seriousness, respect, and care exhibits the importance of the message so that you prevent your tone from moving from sincere to harsh.
- ▲ **Avoid mixed messages.** Mixed messages lessen sincerity. Mixed messages attempt to say something nice in the first part of your message, but are followed by a *but* or *however* that introduces criticism, which the recipient understands to be the real point. For example, “Jim, I know you were trying hard on this project, but the report you did missed the mark and was poorly written.”

3.4.6 Sharing Thoughts and Feelings

Conflict resolution is a matter of problem solving. Two communication tools—the *stating-thoughts* tool and the *stating-feelings* tool—help define and solve problems by getting your points across so the other party can understand where you’re coming from.

Sometimes in the course of a conflict-resolution discussion, you need to offer an opinion. This primarily happens in the course of examining the problem situation but also can occur during dialogue about the solution. So as not to come across as opinionated, use the **stating-thoughts tool**. When stating thoughts, you indicate how the situation is impacting you, and you respond to the person through comments with constructive feedback.

When stating thoughts, you can usually use up to a few sentences. Don’t be long-winded or you’ll sound opinionated, but be sure to place your emphasis on being constructive and providing views supported by factual reasons. Here are some guidelines:

- ▲ **Own the thought.** Use the words *I*, *me*, or *my* to indicate the view is yours.
- ▲ **Tell your thought in positive terms.** Use language constructively, presenting the message in the best way possible and avoid words such as *not* and *but*.
- ▲ **When defining impact, clarify the effect the problem is having on you.** Give facts to support your views or conclusions. Usually this is done right after you've used the describing tool to state observations about your concern. For example:

Based on the concern I just described to you, not getting the information I was expecting at the agreed-upon dates has caused delays for me on this project and is affecting my ability to meet the final target date for the project.

- ▲ **When responding with feedback, focus on issues and behaviors.** Focus your feedback on observations and facts, avoiding interpretations or analysis of other people's perceived intentions.

For example, say, "I'm having difficulty understanding your explanation of the circumstances. Your dates and events aren't coming across in a clear fashion to me." Don't say, "You're not making much sense here. You don't explain things very well."

Conflict situations evoke emotions. Your ability to control your own feelings has great influence on what happens with the other person's emotions. On the other hand, to act as though no emotions exist isn't realistic. The key is to express your emotions rather than show them, and this is where the *stating-feelings* tool comes in to play. With the **stating-feelings** tool, you talk about the emotion that you feel rather than put it on display. This tool often is used right after you use the tool of describing.

With the *stating-feelings* tool, you describe your concern or problem, after which you can state feelings in a few sentences that let the other person know how the situation has made you feel. Here are some guidelines for constructively using the *stating-feelings* tool:

- ▲ **Show ownership of the feeling message.** Use words such as *I*, *me*, or *my* to indicate that you own the feeling.
- ▲ **Name the feeling you have.** Directly identify the emotion you feel.
- ▲ **Use positive language and a sincere tone.** State the message in the best possible tone, with the most accurate meaning. Avoid harsh language or tones. Avoid showing your feelings. Here are contrasting examples:
 - **Stating feelings:** "I was upset by those actions."
 - **Showing feelings:** "I hate when you do that."
- ▲ **Give constructive reasons to explain the basis of your feelings.** Keep your explanations brief and focus on issues and behaviors you've seen. Stick with what has happened as you've experienced it, and don't guess about the meaning behind it.

Expressing what you're feeling constructively and sincerely puts you on the road toward the solution of the conflict by opening up the dialogue. Working together to achieve a solution is the essence of what conflict resolution is all about.



SELF-CHECK

- Define **positive intention, shifting and showing understanding, paraphrasing, reflective paraphrasing, describing, I-messages, stating-thoughts tool, and stating-feelings tool.**
- Describe how a positive intention works in a conflict situation.
- Discuss the difference between describing and interpreting.
- Consider the role of I-messages in conflict resolution.
- Explain how the stating-thoughts and stating-feelings tools solve problems.

3.5 Bringing the Conflict to Resolution

One problem people face when they attempt to deal with conflicts on the job is that they have no problem-solving plan in mind. They talk to the other person but lack a direction to go in and, as a result, have a difficult time of reaching any kind of agreement. You have to know where you're going in such challenging meetings to reach the desired destination—a mutually beneficial solution.

One of two problem-solving models will help you bring conflicts to satisfactory resolution, whether with peers, staff members, vendors, clients, customers, even your boss: **Crafting a plan** and **focusing on a solution**. This section also covers tips on how to assertively handle a few of the challenging reactions that can occur in conflict discussions.

3.5.1 Crafting a Plan

When conflict situations turn into a pattern rather than an occasional incident, you must arrange a special meeting with the other party for the situation to improve. Anxiety and tension certainly enter the picture for both parties in this kind of meeting, but it can serve as a turning point for putting the conflict on a constructive rather than destructive track.

For such meetings to be successful, you must come ready with a plan. Planning helps you stay focused and thus increases the likelihood you can keep the other person focused too. In outlining your plan for the conflict-resolution meeting, find the key points by answering the following questions:

- ▲ **Objective:** What do you want to accomplish in this meeting? What positive outcome will be mutually beneficial while still allowing you to maintain a respectful working relationship?
- ▲ **Introduction:** What will you say up front when you kick off the meeting to set a constructive tone and an organized structure? **Stating positive intentions**, a useful tool for setting the right tone for the meeting, is covered in Section 3.4.1.
- ▲ **Strategy:** What problem-solving model do you plan to follow to guide the flow of the meeting? (The two models are covered in depth in Sections 3.6 and 3.7.)
- ▲ **Objections:** What challenging reactions or other objections do you anticipate? How do you plan to assertively deal with them when they arise in the discussion?
- ▲ **Message:** What key points do you plan to make when you state the problem? What ideas do you have for the solution in terms of what you both can do?

The plan works best when it revolves around the problem-solving model you intend to use. Prepare yourself by filling in the blanks on what you'll say on each point that helps you work through the problem-solving model during the meeting.

3.5.2 Focusing on a Solution

People use two common mind-sets (or ways of thinking) when they deal with problem situations such as conflicts. These mind-sets form the attitude that you bring with you into discussions. They serve as the generator for your behavior and attention.

With a **problem-dwelling mind-set**, more of your attention is directed toward the problem. Problem-dwelling behaviors include the following:

- ▲ Focusing constantly on what's wrong
- ▲ Making accusations or blaming the other person for the problem
- ▲ Pushing guilt or looking for the other person to admit all wrongdoing
- ▲ Debating every contrary point heard

With a **solutions-focused mind-set**, more of your attention is on working out solutions. Solutions-focused behaviors include the following:

- ▲ Stating a positive outcome that you're seeking for the discussion
- ▲ Defining the problem in factual terms as the first step toward solving it
- ▲ Listening to the other person's concerns and then working out a solution together

- ▲ Brainstorming ideas and discussing solutions as a two-way conversation
- ▲ Requesting what you need the other party to do to help resolve a situation and asking or offering what you'll do to help as well

Now contrast these two sets of behaviors in terms of the dynamics or energies they create. What's in common with both sets is that they often stimulate high energy in return: With problem dwelling you get energy that adds tension and drains people, whereas with a solutions focus, you get energy that is uplifting and motivating.

Therefore, a significant part of your preparation is more than just outlining your plan for the discussion. By preparing the mind-set you want to take into the discussion, reminding yourself of the behaviors that influence the solutions-focused mind-set, you're more likely to work out a solution.



SELF-CHECK

- Name two methods of bringing a conflict to resolution.
- Define **problem-dwelling mind-set** and **solutions-focused mind-set**.
- List the questions that help outline a conflict-resolution plan.
- Discuss what the two common mind-sets have in common.

3.6 Using the Resolving-Concerns Conflict-Resolution Model

The **resolving-concerns model** provides a problem-solving plan to use in situations in which the working relationship, for one reason or another, isn't working as well as needed. The resolving-concerns model happens in six steps:

- Step 1:** Introduce the meeting.
- Step 2:** Describe the concern.
- Step 3:** Express your feelings or explain the impact (optional).
- Step 4:** Let the other person respond.
- Step 5:** Work out the solution.
- Step 6:** Close.

3.6.1 Step 1: Introduce the Meeting

Your introduction sets a positive tone and organizes the structure for the meeting. By using the communication tool of stating positive intentions (covered in 3.4.1) you are saying that the actions that follow are meant to be good.

The following are the key points to express in your introduction to the meeting:

1. **State a one-sentence general purpose for the meeting.** For example, “Jack, as you know, I called this meeting to address an issue with you that has been affecting our working relationship.”
2. **State a positive intention, either your own or one the other person can have, along with your own.** For example, “Jack, I want you to know my focus in this meeting is about working out ways to determine how to get the job done well when we work together. I also know that you want to have good results when you take on a job.”
3. **Announce your agenda or plan for the meeting.** Keep it brief and tie it to the steps you intend to follow in the conflict-resolution model. For example, “Jack, I first want to cover the concerns that I have as I see them and the impact they’ve had, and then get your take on the situation. I then want to spend the majority of time exploring solutions with you about how to strengthen our working relationship and then close by confirming an agreement to follow through on what we decide.”

3.6.2 Step 2: Describe the Concern

In many respects, this is the most critical step in the whole process. You can’t solve a problem unless you can clearly define it. On the other hand, if you dwell and offer too many details, you may never move forward to work on a solution. This is where the tool called describing (covered in 3.4.5) comes into play. The following guidelines can help you describe your concerns clearly and constructively:

- ▲ **State your observations, not interpretations.** Describe actions you’ve seen, not your characterizations or assumptions about the actions. For example:
 - **Observation:** “Jack, I’ve noticed that usually two or three reminders are given on my part before I hear an answer from you about my requests.”
 - **Interpretation:** “Jack, the concern I have is that you ignore requests for information I make of you. You act like you’re too busy to bother with me.”

- ▲ **Be direct and sincere.** Don't use any mixed messages.
- ▲ **Be specific.** Summarize the pattern of behavior you have seen that has caused you concern. Use a representative example or two to illustrate your points clearly, but avoid using too much detail. Be specific yet as concise as possible.

3.6.3 Step 3: Express Your Feelings or Explain the Impact (Optional)

This step is optional, and you either express your feelings or explain the impact (see 3.4.6). If you don't think you can do this step constructively and with sincerity, skip it. If you do use it, remember to hit the following basics:

- ▲ **Own the message.** Use the words *I*, *me*, or *my* as opposed to *you*.
- ▲ **When stating feelings, identify the emotion you've felt over the situation.** For example: "Jack, because of the reminders involved in getting answers from you, I often feel annoyed that I need to keep asking."
- ▲ **When stating thoughts, explain how the situation has affected your getting the job done.** For example: "Jack, because of the reminders involved in getting answers from you, my work gets delayed as the information I need does not arrive as needed."
- ▲ **Keep the messages brief,** one to a few sentences at most.

3.6.4 Step 4: Let the Other Person Respond

For some people, this is the toughest step. Almost never do you describe the concern so well that the other person hugs you and apologizes profusely. As concretely and constructively as you've stated the problem, people still need to process what they've heard and respond to it as they desire. That starts you down the road to having two-way conversations. That's why you want to cover Steps 1, 2, and 3 quickly.

Your role in this step is to let the other person have his or her say for a bit. Listen and don't debate what you hear. Employ active listening tools (discussed in 2.4.4 and 2.4.5) to convince the person to explain the specifics of his or her thoughts or concerns. Employ the effort called shifting and showing understanding (highlighted in 3.4.3), providing verbal feedback to demonstrate your understanding of the individual's messages.

Keep in mind that you both don't have to see the problem the same way. You both want to be aware of each other's concerns so that you can take them into consideration when you collaboratively work out the solution.

3.6.5 Step 5: Work Out the Solution

This is the step with which you want to take the most time. The two of you crafting a solution is the key to success with conflicts. In this meeting, as in others, stay focused on solutions and don't dwell on problems.

Three main pieces highlight the solution stage. When applying these three pieces, you often need a transition from the problem-discussion phase to the solutions-discussion phase of the meeting. The best transition is a one- or two-sentence statement of positive intention that tells the other person where you want to go in the meeting at this time. For example: "Jack, as I mentioned at the beginning, my intent is to develop solutions that help us work productively together. Let's move ahead now and focus on doing just that." From there, follow through on the three key steps for working out the solution:

1. **Establish the desired goal.** Make this a one-sentence, positive statement that defines the picture you want to see for the working relationship when it is functioning well. Offer the goal statement as your recommendation and let the other person then respond to it. Here's an example: "Jack, how about this as the goal to shoot for in our working relationship: Establish a working relationship where we work together in a cooperative, respectful, and responsive manner. What do you think?"
2. **Develop ideas to meet the goal.** This element defines the *how*, that is, how you two are going to reach the goal. It defines the actions both parties will take to achieve the goal of the working relationship. This piece can be made to fit by one of three methods:
 - Recommend your ideas and ask for any others the person may have.
 - Solicit ideas first from the other person and then add yours into the mix.
 - Brainstorm in turn.
3. **Propose specific actions.** Whichever of the three methods you use to develop ideas to meet the goal, be prepared to come up with specific actions for the other person, as well as an idea of what you're willing to do. Both parties must contribute and make commitments if the conflict is to truly be resolved.
4. **Evaluate the ideas and reach consensus.** Evaluate the ideas together, trying to determine which will best meet the stated goal. Go after ideas first that are more in common so that consensus can easily be reached. With consensus, you're asking this question, "Can you support this option or idea?" Although people don't generally agree to every idea, they're often willing to support something for the good of the cause.

TIPS FOR BRAINSTORMING

If you choose the brainstorming approach, set ground rules for it up front. Here are some tips for how to run an effective brainstorming session:

- ✓ Go with one idea per person per turn.
- ✓ When someone has a turn but no idea ready to offer, that person *passes* to keep the momentum going.
- ✓ Refrain from making judgments about any of the ideas until after the brainstorming is done. Thus, you have no bad ideas at this stage.
- ✓ Record the ideas as they're presented so that they are visible. Record what the other person says, not your interpretation of what is said.
- ✓ Keep going until you both run out of ideas.

3.6.6 Step 6: Close

After all of the ideas are evaluated and consensus is reached on the ones you both plan to go forward with for your solution, you're ready to bring the meeting to a close. Here are the steps to take in this final stage:

1. Confirm the plan and all the actions agreed upon by both of you.
2. Clarify which steps need to happen for implementation of the solution.
3. Close on a positive note, thanking the person for working with you.

FOR EXAMPLE

An Overzealous Boss

Due to her enthusiasm for her new job, the head of a large public library quickly implemented a host of new programs and services. Her staff, however, was overwhelmed with the amount of work they were given. When an individual staffer talked to her about it, the boss assured them they "could handle it." Rather than griping behind her back, the staff's veteran librarian asked for a private meeting, where she presented her boss with a list of all their concerns. Hearing this convinced the boss that it was indeed too much to handle. The two were happy to discover that volunteers could help with many of the new tasks.

Here are a couple of other tips to cement a strong close for this meeting.

- ▲ **Commit to typing up the agreed-upon plan and providing a copy to the other person.** Writing the agreement down as it is formed helps clarify it for both parties and gives your solutions discussion a focus. Writing down the plan also helps you both avoid having to rely on memories when honoring your commitments.
- ▲ **Set a date for the two of you to get back together in the near future, such as a month out, to review your progress with the plan.** This effort builds accountability for you and the other person and increases the likelihood that the agreement will stick.

SELF-CHECK

- Define the **resolving-concerns** model.
- List the steps of the resolving-concerns conflict-resolution model.
- Discuss how Step 2 is often the most critical in the resolving-concerns process.
- Explain why Step 3 should be omitted in some cases.
- Cite five tips for brainstorming ideas for conflict solutions.

3.7 Understanding the Needs-Based Conflict-Resolution Model

The second of the conflict-resolution models works well when resolving differences that are more work-issue related (as opposed to the relationship-related issues that the resolving-concerns model addresses). As you become familiar with each model, you can often mix and match what you think will result in the best problem-solving plan for handling the conflict. The five steps of the **needs-based conflict-resolution model** are:

- Step 1:** Introduce the meeting
- Step 2:** Define the problem
- Step 3:** Identify the needs of the stakeholders
- Step 4:** Work out the solution
- Step 5:** Close

3.7.1 Step 1: Introduce the Meeting

This step works as follows:

1. State your general purpose for the meeting.
2. Provide a positive intention to set the tone for the discussion.
3. Briefly outline your agenda to give the meeting an organized structure.

3.7.2 Step 2: Define the Problem

In this step, you want to do two main things with the other party:

1. **Develop the problem statement.** This is a one-sentence statement that identifies the issue to be resolved. It isn't the conflict you're having but rather the issue over which the conflict stems.
2. **Clarify the source of the conflict and briefly analyze where the differences are coming from.** Differences on business issues often are around such areas as the following:
 - Different ways or methods to get a job done
 - Different views on how to solve a problem or what strategy to follow
 - Different values or styles in how you approach work
 - Different goals or expectations

Here's a brief example that sets up how you work out Step 2: Deb and Sue are managers whose groups have to work closely together to fulfill customer orders. Currently, a fairly high number of orders, approximately 25 percent, go out incomplete or with the wrong items in them. This, of course, leads to the orders being returned for correction and a great amount of rework that slows everybody down.

Deb has proposed that work should be done to streamline the order-fulfillment process to make it simpler and more efficient. Sue has proposed implementing a formalized training program for all employees because many tend to just learn on the job. Because they disagree on which approach to take, they have a conflict.

- ▲ **Problem statement:** Customer orders aren't being fulfilled accurately on a consistent basis.
- ▲ **Source of the conflict:** Different ideas and views on how to solve this problem.

3.7.3 Step 3: Identify the Needs of the Stakeholders

This is a critical step in the problem-solving process.

- ▲ **Needs** are what drive people; they're your important interests and motivations as related to the business relationship.
- ▲ **Stakeholders** are the key parties affected by the business relationship and by what gets worked out in the conflict resolution. Usually this involves more than just the two parties having the conflict: customers, vendors, investors, other internal groups, your team, the other person's team, management above, or the company or organization as a whole.

In this step, you and the other person should identify the key stakeholders and then list the most critical needs each one has in the business relationship. You're looking at their needs, not at their positions on the issue. Looking at needs helps both of you take a broader perspective to see what's really important.

For example, in the conflict over the order-fulfillment problems in Step 2, Deb and Sue list the key stakeholders in this issue and their main needs:

- ▲ Deb's team:
 - Has accurate customer orders delivered consistently
 - Maintains high levels of customer satisfaction
 - Maintains cooperative working relationships with Sue's team
- ▲ Sue's team:
 - Has accurate customer orders delivered consistently
 - Maintains high levels of customer satisfaction
 - Maintains cooperative working relationships with Deb's team
- ▲ The company:
 - Maintains high levels of customer satisfaction
 - Ensures long-term relationships with customers
 - Provides customers with value for what they buy
 - Maintains an efficient operation
- ▲ Customers:
 - Consistently receive on-time and accurate shipments of product
 - Have vendor relationships marked by reliability and high-quality service
 - Pay a reasonable price and get value in return

As this example points out, by identifying key needs, you begin moving the conflict away from two people and their own positions on an issue toward a broader view of the big picture—who is really affected by this issue and what's really important to them.

3.7.4 Step 4: Work Out the Solution

Now the problem-solving effort kicks into high gear. The following are the three main elements to work through in the solution stage:

1. **Brainstorm ideas to meet the needs.** Take turns throwing out ideas to meet the needs that were identified. Keep those needs as your visible guide and refrain from making any judgments about the ideas until after the brainstorming is done. Don't forget to record your ideas as they're stated.
2. **Evaluate the ideas against the needs.** This is the beauty of identifying the needs first. It establishes the criteria for evaluating your ideas. Therefore, the discussion no longer needs to dwell on your position versus the other person's position. You evaluate the ideas together based on how well they meet any and all of the needs you've listed.
3. **Reach consensus on what is most mutually beneficial.** Step 2 often rolls right into Step 3. You're looking to reach an agreement on the ideas that best meet needs of all of the stakeholders affected by the conflict.

3.7.5 Step 5: Close

After you reach agreement on the ideas to act upon, confirm this understanding with the other party and clarify what needs to happen to implement the solution—who's going to do what and when.

Setting a follow-up date to review progress often is a good idea. Doing so means that both of you are serious about making the agreement work. You want to give the solution time to be implemented, but at the same time, you don't want to go so far out that you forget about the agreement.

SELF-CHECK

- Define needs-based conflict-resolution model, needs, and stakeholders.
- List the steps of the needs-based resolution process.
- Discuss the three critical elements of Step 4, the solution stage.
- Explain the benefit of setting up a follow-up date in Step 5.

FOR EXAMPLE**Cooking Up Business**

Casey's home-based muffin business had grown enough that she and an investor decided it was time for her to rent out commercial space and hire two employees. She did fine during the fall and the holiday season, but business slowed dramatically in the months following. When it became clear to the investor that Casey would have to let at least one of the employees go in order to stay afloat, Casey and the investor decided to meet. Casey was not happy about having to lose an employee, but she was equally worried about what would happen to the other stakeholders involved (herself and her family, the investor, her two employees and their families, her customers, the restaurants she supplied her muffins to, her suppliers, the owner of her rental property) if she were to go out of business completely.

3.8 Dealing with the Challenging Reactions

Like anything in life, the best-laid plans don't always lead to smooth actions. Coming in with a problem-solving model that provides you with a plan to resolve the conflict, however, increases the likelihood that you'll reach a mutually beneficial solution.

Nevertheless, challenging reactions do arise sometimes, and you have to be able to deal with them constructively when they do. If you can't, you may not be able to work out a solution. Remember, you're not done until an agreement has been reached.

The following sections cover two challenging reactions that can come up in conflict-resolution discussions. You get helpful tips to work through these challenges so that you can reach the agreement you seek.

3.8.1 Handling the Defensive Reactions

When people react defensively, trying to get your point across is difficult. A loud voice, anxious body language, interruptions, and verbal counterattacks are signs of defensive reactions. In a conflict-resolution discussion, these behaviors often start right when you bring up the problem.

First, here's what to do when faced with these defensive hurdles:

- ▲ **Avoid debating.** If you counter every attack or contrary point with an argument, the great debate will rage on. Such debating tends to fuel more defensiveness.
- ▲ **Avoid abandoning ship.** Ending the conversation when the other person becomes defensive is nonassertive and counterproductive.

Therefore, here are a few tips to help you manage a challenging reaction:

- ▲ **Shift and show understanding first.** This active-listening tool (as described in Section 3.4.3), lets the other person have his or her say. After you've heard the person out, paraphrase or reflective paraphrase to check your understanding of the message.
- ▲ **Speak to clarify, not to counter.** After you've paraphrased or reflectively paraphrased to show understanding, speak only to clarify, add useful information, or address a concern that you've heard. Start out by saying such comments as "Let me clarify something for you," or "I'd like to briefly address a concern you raised."
- ▲ **Ask the other person to check understanding of your message.** In essence, you're asking the other party to paraphrase what you've said. It, too, is best done after you've shown understanding of the other person's message. Ask an open-ended question such as "Can you please describe your understanding of what I was telling you?"
- ▲ **Restate your positive intention.** By giving a reminder of the positive intention from your introduction, you refocus both of you on making something positive happen.
- ▲ **Move forward to the solution stage.** After you've heard the person out, move ahead as quickly as you can toward working on the resolution to the conflict.

3.8.2 Coping with the Reluctant Solution Maker

Sometimes the obstacle comes as you are attempting to work out the solution to the conflict. Your ideas are met with criticism and the other person offers little in return to help. You feel as though you're going nowhere and an agreement never will be reached. Here are a few tips to help you work through this challenge:

- ▲ **Uncover concerns.** When your ideas are met with responses like, "That won't work," stick with the discussion. Ask questions to get an explanation for the concerns the other person has with your idea.
- ▲ **Brainstorm together.** Take the pressure to come up with all the ideas off you by setting up a brainstorming effort in which you each take turns coming up with ideas.
- ▲ **Talk benefits.** Sometimes, people need to hear about the benefits to be convinced that the solution is a good one. Benefits can be saving time, saving money, improving communication, and increasing efficiency, to name a few.

FOR EXAMPLE**Writing to Potential**

Because Sean has been given more managerial duties to deal with lately, he's had to pass on more of his proposal writing to David, who has had some experience with the work. Although Sean has walked him through several proposals, he feels David is not doing as well as he should. He gives him another chance, and then decides that David might need some additional training. When the two meet to discuss the problem, David is uncharacteristically loud and belligerent. Sean listens to David, then clarifies that David's writing is not the problem; more so, the problem lies in some specific proposal-writing skills that he could learn in two or three sessions of afternoon training. Upon hearing this, David settles down, and the two work out the details of their solution.

- ▲ **Explore consequences.** This is a last resort. When every other option fails to come up with a solution, explore what can happen if the conflict is left unresolved, such as getting others—usually management above you—involved. Ask an open-ended question to get the other person to think about this: “If we leave this issue unsettled, what happens for us?”

**SELF-CHECK**

- Cite ways that people react defensively in conflict-resolution situations.
- Describe ways of dealing with defensive reactions.
- Explain methods of coping with people who are reluctant to work out solutions.

SUMMARY

Conflict doesn't have to be a negative part of your life. This chapter outlined how to approach and resolve such situations in a constructive way instead of turning them into major confrontations. Of the four types of approaches, the assertive approach was explained to be the most effective. Being consistently respectful is

an integral part of the assertive approach. Assertive communication tools such as positive intentions, showing understanding, and describing all work to keep conflicts under control. When it comes to reaching a mutually beneficial solution, you must craft a plan. The resolving-concerns model and the needs-based model are two effective ways of reaching a resolution. Tips for handling defensive reactions and reluctant solution makers will prepare you for dealing with further challenges of conflicts.

KEY TERMS

Aggressive approach	Hard-charging method of dealing with conflict, often interpreted as hostile in manner; you come across as seeking to control or dominate; you don't back down.
Assertive approach	Expressing your rights and views in a positive and confident manner, and enabling others to do the same with the intent and effort to work out resolutions.
Conflict	A problem in which two or more people have a difference of opinions, methods, goals, styles, values, and so on.
Consistently respectful	A considerate and constructive way of interacting and working with others, building a foundation that allows for assertive approaches to future conflict situations.
Describing	Reporting behaviors that someone displays in observable and objective terms; telling what you see, not giving your opinions about what you see.
I-messages	Statements such as "I've noticed" or "I've observed" that have you own your message, helping your focus on actions and issues, not people.
Need	That which drives or motivates people.
Needs-based model	A five-step conflict resolution model that is effective in resolving work-related, as opposed to relationship-oriented, issues.

Nonassertive approach	In this method of dealing with conflict, you maintain a passive manner and do not express your rights or views.
Paraphrasing	Restating the main idea of a speaker's message to verify or clarify your understanding of the facts or content of that message.
Passive-aggressive approach	Communications and actions come across as subtle, yet negative, and implied, while manipulative.
Positive intention	A statement that tells the other person in your conversation that you mean well.
Problem-dwelling mind-set	When dealing with a conflict, this way of thinking directs most of your attention toward the problem.
Reflective paraphrasing	Identifying the emotion and the meaning of a message.
Resolving-concerns model	Provides a problem-solving plan to use in situations in which the working relationship isn't working as it should.
Shift and show understanding	Helps you listen actively in conflict situations by shifting your attention off of your own message and onto capturing the other person's message.
Solutions-focused mind-set	When dealing with a conflict, this way of thinking directs most of your attention to working out a solution.
Stakeholders	Key parties affected by a business relationship.
Stating-feelings tool	Use it to let the other person know how a situation has made you feel; with it, you talk about emotion, rather than put it on display.
Stating-thoughts tool	Use it to indicate how the situation is impacting you; employs constructive feedback.

ASSESS YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Go to www.wiley.com/college/Brounstein to evaluate your knowledge of the basics of effective conflict resolution.

Measure your learning by comparing pre-test and post-test results.

Summary Questions

1. Conflicts are more likely to be found in personal situations than business situations. True or false?
2. Which of the following is an example of what not to do in a conflict situation?
 - (a) go to someone other than the source
 - (b) react defensively
 - (c) issue an ultimatum
 - (d) all of the above
3. Being solutions oriented creates an improvement, corrects an error, or makes things better than they were originally. True or false?
4. In the aggressive approach to handling conflict, which of the following behaviors are exhibited?
 - (a) blaming
 - (b) appeasing
 - (c) rambling
 - (d) all of the above
5. The passive-aggressive approach has underlying actions that may be received as hurtful. True or false?
6. In the nonassertive approach to handling conflict, which of the following behaviors are exhibited?
 - (a) avoidance
 - (b) withholding
 - (c) going to the source
 - (d) all of the above
7. A person who is consistently respectful is only able to solve issues with those people with which they share common interests. True or false?
8. Which of the following are principles of being consistently respectful?
 - (a) long-term relationship building
 - (b) understanding
 - (c) collaboration
 - (d) all of the above

9. Creative thinking is one benefit of using a consistently respectful approach. True or false?
10. A positive intention expresses
 - (a) your own statement that you mean well
 - (b) your understanding of the other person's good intentions
 - (c) that the discussions that follow are meant to be good
 - (d) all of the above
11. To establish a structure for a meeting, an agenda should
 - (a) state the issue
 - (b) state the solution
 - (c) describe the solution
 - (d) all of the above
12. The describing tool is used to state your assumptions about another person's motives. True or false?
13. Coming into a conflict-resolution situation with a plan decreases its chances of success. True or false?
14. A problem-dwelling mind-set is likely to result in a solution. True or false?
15. Work-related issues are best solved by using the resolving-concerns conflict-resolution model. True or false?
16. Which of the following belong in the introduction of a meeting?
 - (a) an agenda
 - (b) a positive intention
 - (c) a one-sentence description of the general purpose of the meeting
 - (d) all of the above
17. Express your feelings in a meeting only if you can do so with sincerity. True or false?
18. The needs-based conflict-resolution model may sometimes be combined with the resolving-concerns model. True or false?
19. The two parties in a conflict are the stakeholders. True or false?
20. Which of the following elements can help work out a solution?
 - (a) brainstorm ideas to meet needs
 - (b) evaluate ideas against needs
 - (c) reach consensus
 - (d) all of the above
21. Defensive reactions include
 - (a) avoidance
 - (b) anxious body language
 - (c) passive-aggressiveness
 - (d) all of the above

22. Which of the following can help cope with a reluctant solution-maker?
- (a) talking benefits
 - (b) brainstorming
 - (c) exploring consequences
 - (d) all of the above

Review Questions

1. Why is it important to go to the source when approaching a conflict situation?
2. Explain why avoidance is not an effective way to resolve a conflict.
3. Cite the four approaches to conflict resolution.
4. Explain why the assertive approach offers the best choice for dealing with workplace conflicts.
5. Under what circumstances is it better to wait for another time to deal with a conflict situation?
6. Being **consistently respectful** is a key element of the assertive approach to conflict situations. Define *consistently respectful*.
7. The consistently respectful approach relies on two concepts for interacting with others. Describe the two concepts.
8. Conflicts can be managed. Explain one positive benefit of conflicts.
9. A positive intention is an important conflict-resolution tool. Give an example of a positive intention.
10. What is the first step in making shifting and showing understanding work?
11. The **describing tool** is a way to avoid general criticism. Define *describing*.
12. People use two common ways of thinking to deal with conflicts. Name the mind-set that is directed toward solving a problem.
13. What do the two mind-sets have in common?
14. The resolving-concerns model is better suited to situations involving working relationships or work issues?
15. The fourth step of the resolving-concerns model is the toughest for some people. Explain why.
16. In the final stage, both parties work to find a solution. List the three ways that two parties can come up with ideas.
17. Which of the conflict-resolution models works well when resolving differences that are related to relationships?
18. In a situation where the security guards at an airport go on strike, who are four stakeholders affected by what gets worked out in the conflict resolution?

19. You may come across challenging situations even when you have a conflict-resolution plan. Describe two types of challenges.
20. What is the last resort when dealing with a reluctant solutions maker?

Applying This Chapter

1. You're a portrait photographer who has just received a telephone message from a client who "hates" the 18-person portrait that was shot as a gift for her great-grandmother's ninetieth birthday. Come up with a plan for handling the situation. Should you meet in person or speak on the phone? What communication tools will you need to resolve the issue?
2. Recall a recent conflict in which you or another party used either the aggressive, passive-aggressive, or nonassertive approach. Recast the conflict using the assertive approach. Could the conflict have been resolved more successfully with the assertive approach?
3. In your role as a legal assistant in a criminal law office, you deal with people who've been accused of a variety of crimes. How should you apply the consistently respectful approach to your dealings with clients?
4. Think of an example in which you and another person were faced with a problem or conflict. Quickly jot down what happened in the situation, as if you were going to give it to your closest friend to read. Now, keeping in mind that describing involves behaviors and not attitudes, rewrite the example using the describing tool. How different are the two versions?
5. One of your classmates becomes very defensive during the weekly group sessions when students are asked to critique each other's work. Often, the discussions deteriorate into a heated debate. As the leader of this week's group discussion, what strategies would you bring to the table to keep the group on track?
6. Your company midlevel managers meet once a month to give progress reports, discuss issues, and develop ideas for future projects. Each of the ten managers takes turns leading the meeting. You and several other managers have noticed that Neil, one of the newer managers, is disrespectful and speaks out of turn whenever a female manager leads a meeting. Use the resolving-concerns model to plan a conflict resolution with Neil.
7. In order for your magazine to meet its scheduled print date, many elements of the production process have to be done on time: articles written and copyedited, photos collected, designs created and laid out. As editor in chief, you have final say over which photos are used, and you often make last-minute changes as you see fit. Your art director typically attacks you and other staffers with statements such as: "Hey, I can't make my deadlines when things are changing so much in the final stages. The photos were fine

last week; they should be fine this week. This isn't my fault!" Use the needs-based model to plan your conflict-resolution meeting

8. Your small ice-cream truck business has provided the sweet treats for a local preschool's carnival for the past six years. This year you showed up with the usual amount of ice cream, but it won't be enough because the students' siblings were invited for the first time this year. The carnival's coordinator insists she did change the order, but you show her your records that indicate otherwise. You see that she's losing control of her emotions. How should you handle her defensive reaction?

YOU TRY IT

The Respectful Approach

Your boss has asked you to work with another team member to plan a luncheon and tour for some board members who are coming to see your organization's new offices. Unfortunately, the last time you worked together was not a great experience; she was unpleasant to work with, you couldn't agree on anything, and she didn't do her share of the work. In spite of it all, the project was completed. Come up with a consistently respectful approach to talk with your coworker in order for things to go more smoothly this time.

Planning Ahead

Rob, one of your employees, has not been very productive lately; you've noticed that he's coming in late more than twice a week, and he's been spending more

time than usual on personal phone calls. You suspect that something's going on in his personal life, but it's your job to speak with him about his lack of productivity. Draft an outline for your meeting.

Food Fight

You've been elected by your coworkers to confront Tom, a longtime employee, about his lunch choices. Each day for the past six weeks, much to the dismay of the rest of the office, he heats up a pre-packaged diet meal and eats at his desk. No one enjoys the odor, but the passing comments others have made to Tom have fallen on deaf ears. Beginning with the appropriate positive intention, jot down your notes in preparation for your private conversation with Tom.