

PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PRESENTS:

Recognize
– *and Prevent* –
the Causes of
Workplace
Conflict

**Understanding the problems
that create conflict will better
prepare you to resolve it**



PROGRESSIVE
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Recognize – and Prevent – the Causes of Workplace Conflict

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Women who lead in the workplace can be assured of one thing: At some point, you'll have to be the peacemaker in an on-the-job conflict.

Though we do our best to keep our departments or offices free of drama, bickering and insubordination, inevitably conflict situations will arise.

She Said It:

“If you have a difficult person on your staff, people are watching the dynamics of how you handle it. And if you let that person persist and make everyone else miserable, that’s a reflection on your leadership.”

– Danielle Moss Lee, Chief Executive of the YWCA of the City of New York, in *The New York Times*

Even the most diplomatic leaders dread defusing battles between co-workers or, worse, between themselves and another co-worker.

Many women strive to maintain a sense of camaraderie with employees and co-workers, but sometimes we come across as overly friendly to avoid a superior “Boss-Lady” appearance. This approach might win us employees’ affections, but it can backfire when it comes to laying down the law and nipping conflict situations in the bud.

It's best to stop conflicts from occurring before they start, but it's easier said than done, despite our best efforts.

Wading into potential conflict situations is something many women managers dread. Often, negotiating potential conflict minefields makes us unsure of where and how hard to step.

Recognizing WHY conflict happens is the key to knowing how to resolve it – and to making sure those catalysts don’t happen again.

In this Leadership Insider, we’ll show you four of the top causes of conflict in the workplace, why they happen, and how to prevent them in the first place. We’ll guide you through how to use your leadership skills to keep workplace harmony without having to play constant referee or disrupt your relationship with employees.

How good are you at resolving conflict? Examining your inner “conflict intelligence meter” could be a useful step in identifying the reasons why you react in specific ways to conflict, and can teach you how keeping or changing some approaches could help you do it better.

Exercise: Assess Your Conflict Intelligence Meter

"Conflict Intelligence" refers to our ability to be both self-aware and aware of others when involved in conflict. This assessment, adapted from CINERGY® Coaching (www.cinergycoaching.com), shows how you currently rate your level of conflict intelligence. Answer each according to the numbers below.

1 Never / 2 Sometimes / 3 Often / 4 Always

1. I try to improve areas that are not working for me when it comes to engaging in and managing conflict. 1 2 3 4
2. I realize when my "hot buttons" are being pushed and try not to react. 1 2 3 4
3. I am intuitive about and respect others' "hot buttons" and boundaries. 1 2 3 4
4. I listen attentively to others when in a conflict and don't interrupt when they're telling me what I said or did that upset them. 1 2 3 4
5. I accept that I don't have to be right all the time. 1 2 3 4
6. I don't intentionally offend anyone and when I do, I take responsibility for my contribution to the discord. 1 2 3 4
7. I don't get defensive when people say offensive things to me. Rather, I listen for the real intent of the message and respond appropriately. 1 2 3 4
8. I make my best effort to see how the other person and I may be able to collaborate and cooperate when we're in conflict. 1 2 3 4
9. I agree to disagree when necessary, and do so with grace and understanding. 1 2 3 4

Exercise: Assess Your Conflict Intelligence Meter

(Continued)

10. I remain flexible and open when in conflict and don't let my hurt feelings or positions on a matter take over. 1 2 3 4
11. I'm able to set my ego aside when in conflict and don't take things personally. 1 2 3 4
12. I examine the assumptions and motives that I attribute to others, rather than operating on my perceptions about them. 1 2 3 4
13. I'm pretty resilient when it comes to conflict. I forgive and let go and don't carry a grudge. 1 2 3 4
14. I'm comfortable with my own emotions and those of others. I don't let emotions interfere with my efforts to effectively engage in conflict. 1 2 3 4
15. I see opportunity in conflict and don't avoid engaging in it, unless there's a good reason to. 1 2 3 4

Add the numbers you selected together:

Total 50-60: *I have a good amount of conflict intelligence.*

Total 35-49: *I've got some conflict intelligence but could use some improvement.*

Total 15-34: *I've got more work to do on my conflict intelligence level.*

Total 0-14: *I need a lot of improvement in my conflict intelligence level.*

There are ways to identify the most common causes of conflict and deflect them before they cause irreparable damage. The key is to recognize the telltale signs of why they occur so you can prevent them from wreaking havoc in your workplace.

Conflict Cause 1: Competition Run Amok

Two hard-working employees, Maureen and Susan, have been working for you for almost an equal period of time. You know both of them are always eager to make a good impression. Trouble is, you've noticed that their competitiveness has begun to take the form of backbiting and constant harping at each other. Everyone knows the two of them always try to one-up the other, and it's starting to get mean-spirited.

Why It's a Cause for Conflict:

Competition is usually a good thing. A sense of spirited competition raises the work level of your department and helps everyone meet goals. You want to encourage employees to have a congenial sense of competition when it's warranted.

But there are times when people take competition too far, by undermining others' efforts and making it personal. That's not only unhelpful to your workplace; it can be downright toxic, even for those not caught in the crossfire.

This is when your competitive workplace environment becomes hostile. Obviously, there are fields (such as sales) that promote competitive environments more than others. When salary is linked to employee production, a workplace may experience strong competition between employees. If a company's or department's leaders fail to manage competition, employees could resort to sabotaging or insulting one another, even flouting office protocols. Competition becomes a cause for conflict when it elevates individualism above overall teamwork.

To Avoid Favoritism, Watch Your ‘Friendship Status’

Leadership coach Kristi Hedges, author of *Power of Presence: Unlock Your Potential to Influence and Engage Others*, told *Forbes* that forging close friendships across reporting lines can hinder your objectivity when you’re faced with brokering misunderstandings, disagreements and conflicts of interest.

Being too chummy can compromise your relationships with employees. Two subordinates who are involved in a conflict may both think, “Well, Janice isn’t just my boss, she’s my friend. I know she’ll side with me in this situation.”

The obvious problem: If you’re too tight with all of your employees, it’s difficult (if not impossible) to be honestly objective when two of those co-workers are involved in a conflict. Your ability to remain impartial goes right out the door.

No matter how congenial we are, part of leading well involves establishing that we’re in charge. Employees need to know that you’re first and foremost their supervisor, and thus your top priority is to do your job. This should be reaffirmed when an issue arises between employees, so they don’t take your decisions personally. Your approach should be to tell both parties you’re treating the situation impartially, and to treat both on equal footing.

How to Solve It: Discourage Unhealthy Competition

When it comes to your attention that you’ve got a competition conflict that’s going from bad to worse, it’s your job as a leader to step in. Whether you have two employees who are fighting for plumb sales accounts or even the larger office, your immediate response to these conflict situations is essential. Allowing things to fester just because you want to keep a fragile peace sends a signal to those you lead that you’re willing to overlook potential problems. Follow these steps to redirect competitive conflict:

Stay outside of the argument. Step away from what the employees are wrangling over and concentrate on how to create a competitive balance that will make them both happy. People who are involved in competitive situations often see only a “win-lose” outcome; either they win or they lose. Stress that friendly competitive rivalry isn’t all bad. For example: “OK, you both feel the other is encroaching on your sales accounts territory. What would each of you propose to fix this?”

Maintain a positive outlook. Maybe one co-worker routinely takes credit for the other’s ideas – a common occurrence in a competitive work environment. Rather than accuse her angrily, consider airing the complaints calmly, with either one or both of them present (your call). Keep an open mind, and try not to assume that the accuser is solely in the right. It’s possible that the accused employee was just trying to be proactive and didn’t realize she was stepping on toes to get ahead.

Determine underlying needs. The goal of conflict resolution is not to decide which person is right or wrong; the goal is to reach a solution that everyone can live with. Is the problem that the employees aren’t adequately challenged? Is there an underlying motivation (e.g., job insecurity, fear of not meeting goals) that’s contributing to the competitive behavior? Focusing on what the conflicting employees need is a powerful tool for generating win/win options.

Exercise: What Would YOU Do?

How seasoned do you think you are at resolving conflicts? Do co-workers refer to you as the “diplomat” or the “drill sergeant”? Naturally, different communication styles yield different approaches to solving conflicts. Take this short quiz and choose the result that would most likely describe your reaction to each conflict scenario:

1. Employees are complaining about a small group who uses the lunchroom and leaves it a mess.

- a. Call a meeting to find out who left the mess.
- b. Set up a “chore” list in the lunchroom and rotate cleaning duties among employees.
- c. Tell the complainers they should confront the lunchroom mess-makers.
- d. Report the situation to HR to resolve.

2. Employee A accuses Employee B of bullying; but other co-workers say Employee A just takes things too personally.

- a. Secretly listen in on conversations between Employees A and B to determine the problem.
- b. Talk with both Employee A and Employee B separately to clarify what’s going on.
- c. Hold a general staff meeting to discuss bullying behaviors.
- d. Go with Employee A to confront Employee B concerning the behavior.

3. Two managers who report to you have very different work ethics and are starting to clash.

- a. See to it that the clashing managers have as little to do with working together as possible.
- b. Try to make concessions to each manager to keep them happy.
- c. Speak to both managers separately to hear their concerns about the other.
- d. Report both managers to HR and ask them to step in to settle the conflict.

Exercise: What Would YOU Do? (Continued)

- 4. You notice meetings are usually dominated by two or three employees who go back and forth at each other, leaving little room for others' contributions.**
 - a. Let the employees go back and forth during the meeting to get their ideas heard.
 - b. Calmly interject that you've only got an hour for the meeting and a lot to cover.
 - c. Steer the meeting conversation back to the specific topics you need to cover.
 - d. Ask the dominant employees to write their thoughts out and send them to you.

- 5. One of your employees constantly complains that his co-workers don't treat him with respect.**
 - a. Interview the other co-workers separately and ask them how they treat the complaining employee.
 - b. Send all the co-workers an email about the situation behind the employee's back.
 - c. Enlist some of the co-workers to note interactions with the employee that seem "disrespectful" and report them to you.
 - d. Ask the employee who said what to him that he felt was disrespectful.

If you answered mostly a-b, you're pretty much a diplomat, easygoing when it comes to resolving conflicts. But your leadership position could, at times, require you to be a bit more forceful in these situations. If you answered mostly c-d, you're more of a drill sergeant when it comes to stopping conflicts. But there could be times when you can take a softer approach.

Conflict Cause 2: The Emotional Stage

Helen, one of your top employees, is mentoring Kristen, a new employee. Helen tells you after about three months on the job, Kristen is still struggling with one or two of her job duties. Helen has reassured Kristen that improvement takes time, but the newbie seems to get overly upset and confrontational when told she needs to do a better job in those areas. Helen says she's trying to be patient with Kristen, but her emotional reactions to constructive criticism aren't helping. How can you help Helen resolve this?

She Said It:

“It's possible to conceive conflict as not necessarily a wasteful outbreak of incompatibilities, but a normal process by which socially valuable differences register ... for the enrichment of all concerned.”

– Mary Parker Follett, management consultant and pioneer in organizational theory and behavior

Why It's a Cause for Conflict:

Dealing with someone who reacts dramatically to criticism can create conflict. We're often tempted to withhold criticism altogether when we know the overblown reaction we're likely to get. But acting like everything is fine doesn't do your emotional employee any good. You don't want to tread on eggshells every time you or another manager has to correct that person. Similar to competitive conflict, there's often something else underlying a person's overly dramatic reaction to criticism. Some employees simply take things too personally, and others who usually avoid drama could be dragged into conflicts against their will.

How to Solve It: Don't Unwittingly Add to the Drama

You don't want to (and really can't) tell people how to think. Some feelings of anger and/or hurt naturally can accompany conflict situations, such as hearing bad news or receiving criticism of your work or conduct. The most important move is to defuse the drama as quickly as possible, while still acknowledging the feelings of the hurt party. To take the drama down a notch, follow these steps:

Let employees express their feelings. This is a key first step, because you're never going to get to the basic facts of what caused the conflict by glossing over the feelings of those involved. It's human nature for people (unlike robots) to sometimes react first and ask questions later. So before any kind of problem-solving can take place, these emotions should be expressed and acknowledged. For example: "OK, you've been upset ever since our meeting ended. Why?"

Stick to the Conflict Script

Even in situations where we're in control, any difficult conversation could spiral into an emotional exchange.

Conversations that can be fraught with conflict (and emotion) demand prep work before trouble starts. Keep this Progressive Women's Leadership Conflict Script in mind whenever you're bracing for confrontation:

- 1) **When _____ [this happens] _____, ...** This makes clear from the outset that you're confronting the person about one specific issue or action, and not any outside or incidental problems. This works to hopefully disarm the confrontee, because rather than approaching them with a blanket generalization (e.g., "I've got a problem with you!"), you're addressing something concrete.
- 2) **...I _____ [feel this way] _____ because _____ [frustration]_____.** This describes why you've got the problem with their behavior. It directly points to what happens when the person does this, to give the person something specific to focus on. It also takes the problem issue from personal (e.g., "I don't like that you do this") to objective (e.g., "This bad thing happens when you do this").
- 3) **If you _____ [take this action] _____, ...** This presents an idea for how the person can remedy the situation. You're approaching the person with the idea that he or she can adjust the problem behavior already – that the solution is in their hands, not yours.
- 4) **...I'll _____ [do this to compromise] _____.** This shows you're also willing to adjust your thinking on the person and the problem by stepping up in response to their changed behavior. This subtly says "I can make changes too," and takes away the notion of blame.

If the confrontee pushes back, listen but also ask direct questions (e.g., "Why would setting earlier deadlines not be possible?"). The key is not to turn the discussion into an argument that both of you are concerned with winning. If the confrontee senses that you're trying to boss them, he or she will likely "yes" you with no real intention of resolving the problem.

Let cooler heads prevail. Before suggesting ways to resolve the conflict, wait until both parties have calmed down, says David W. Ballard, a psychologist and head of the American Psychological Association's Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program. "It's difficult to have a productive discussion if [co-workers] are angry or upset. Wait until [they're both] clear-headed," he says.

Get to an agreed-on area. Find some common basis of agreement, no matter how small. If the two people involved can agree at least on why the conflict occurred in the first place, that's a step closer to them agreeing on what to do about it. The root cause could have been a simple misunderstanding – which you could help both parties recognize.

Exercise: How Do You Approach Conflict?

We all like to think we can deflect conflict when we encounter it. But at times, it isn't so easy – or obvious – to decide what to do. Some people rise to the battle and others try to remain as impartial as possible. But different situations call for different reactions. Consider the following situations and assess how you would react:

When you sense an imminent conflict with another person, the best move is:

- a. To say, "Let's agree to set aside enough time to talk about this when we're both ready"
- b. To say, "Let's agree not to talk about this anymore and put it behind us"
- c. To shut down or walk away from the other person
- d. To combat or coerce the other person

When you're in conflict with another person, it's important to:

- a. Say as little as possible and move on
- b. Pick out the agreed-upon issues that need to be resolved
- c. Talk about your side of the issue that's most important to you
- d. Argue with the other person and try to prove to him/her wrong

When stuck in a conflict, you feel the best approach to reaching agreement is:

- a. To agree on something however small and move on
- b. To have a moderate discussion for an agreed-upon amount of time, and move on even if there isn't a solution
- c. To state your case but agree to disagree
- d. To hammer out the conflict face to face for as long as it takes to find a solution that works

Exercise: How Do You Approach Conflict? (Continued)

When trying to resolve a conflict, how much time do you feel it should take?

- a. No more than one hour, and then agree to move on
- b. Two hours should be enough time
- c. For as long as it takes to find a solution that both agree on
- d. For as long as it takes to get the other person to agree with me

When in a conflict situation with another person, it's best to talk:

- a. Openly in front of others so it doesn't escalate
- b. With a mediator, or someone who can help reach a solution
- c. Privately, with no distractions or interruptions
- d. With one other person present as a witness

If your answers were mostly a-b, you're more of an avoider of conflict and often seek outside help to resolve problems. If your answers are mostly c-d, you tackle conflict head on and don't need to seek outside help.

Adapted from: "Do I Resolve Conflict Effectively?" at www.quibblo.com

Conflict Cause 3: The Gathering Storm

Two supervisors you manage, Donald and Jack, never got along well. But recently, their interactions have gotten so bad that employees in their departments don't want to work together. You've been told by HR that the fighting needs to stop or one or both of the supervisors would have to be let go. You work well with both of them and they're good at what they do. How do you stop the storm before it becomes a hurricane?

She Said It:

“ If you truly want to elevate your leadership, get curious about an opposing point of view to see if you have the character to hear what triggers you without getting drawn in. ”

– Marlene Chism, consultant, international speaker and author

Why It's a Cause for Conflict:

Some people just don't mix – in any given workplace, that's to be expected. Outside work, two constantly conflicting personalities likely wouldn't even be friends. The only reason they're required to be civil is because they work together. When what starts as two employees butting heads moves into a full-on feud, conflict results because the original problem was allowed to grow. Not wanting to admit to seeing a problem (or being afraid of blowing something already bad into something worse) allows the conflict to worsen, until it ends up affecting those outside of it from doing their jobs. “Don't get me involved in the middle of this!” might be the easy way out, but that could sink your well-run ship.

How to Solve It: Encourage, Don't Force, a Truce

In these situations, managers can adopt a mediator role to defuse the situation and find resolution, or make a choice to transfer or remove someone based on inability to function on a team. The key to any conflict resolution is to be sure it sticks. While you don't want to become the office cop, you should follow up regularly to see that the resolution you and your employees agreed on is working. To guide feuding parties toward a truce, follow these steps:

Define the real problem. Are differing personality styles the main problem, or does it go deeper? Meet with employees separately at first and question them about the situation. For example, one supervisor may resent having to bend his team's work to constantly meet the other supervisor's deadlines or wishes. Rather than voice his frustrations and seek changes, he instead lets the problem simmer.

Don't Judge a Conflict – Investigate Instead

Even if you initially feel one person is right and the other wrong in a conflict situation, assuming the mantle of judge and jury might not help. At the outset, instead take on the role of investigator: Finding out what happened and what the underlying problem is will best lead to how it can be resolved.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, professor at Harvard Business School and chair and director of the Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative, told *Harvard Business Review* that women leaders should keep three steps in mind to calm touchy situations:

Step 1: Let each person speak his piece.

Consider this an evidence-collecting step. You might think that a small event caused the drama, but if you listen closely you'll notice that the conflict was probably inevitable for larger, more subtle reasons. Giving each person a hearing also helps them let off steam. "People calm down when they can tell their story and know that it's heard," Kanter says.

Step 2: Use a conflict-breaker. Remind those involved of what's more important than the cause of the conflict. For example, Employee A claims Employee B is intentionally stealing her ideas. Your conflict-breaker could be: "Sometimes great minds think alike. What specifically happened to lead you to that conclusion?"

Step 3: Offer support, not a mandate.

Show employees ways they can resolve conflicts themselves, and avoid the temptation to jump in to do it yourself. "Empower them by backing them up – trust that they can do what needs to be done, with your support," Kanter says.

Being known as fair and empathetic will earn you respect on the job – and will ultimately help you keep the peace.

Acknowledge that a difficult situation exists.

Resist the temptation to downplay the employees' feelings and chalk the situation up to a mere personality conflict. Try to help both parties find common ground together. For example, explain to both employees that you know they each want to achieve goals, and that it can be tough to work together on different schedules.

Ask both parties to come up with a solution.

It's probable that you can come up with a few solutions that will satisfy everyone. Agree on one, then discuss a plan to make it happen. Make sure both involved parties buy into the proposed resolution and the plan to do it. Silence or reticence could be a sign of passive resistance, so get explicit agreement from each. If necessary, write a collective email detailing the problem, solution and plan so that all involved receive the same message.

Conflict Cause 4: The Generation Gap

Your team of employees is comprised of seasoned workers and relative “rookies” to the job. While they usually work well together, you’ve been told by at least two of your veterans that the younger workers slack off or are perceived as not pulling their weight. Your instincts tell you that most of the newbies just tend to work at a different pace to complete their work. But the misconception persists – and it’s causing friction.

She Said It:

“Conflict can and should be handled constructively; when it is, relationships benefit. Conflict avoidance is not the hallmark of a good relationship.”

– Harriet B. Braiker, author of *Who's Pulling Your Strings? How to Break the Cycle of Manipulation and Regain Control of Your Life*

Why It's a Cause for Conflict:

Conflict situations like this simmer because the resentments the conflicting parties feel are usually left unsaid. When someone thinks, “Well, that’s just the way she is!” when complaining about someone’s behavior, they’re relying on generalizations and preconceived notions, not on a specific problem that could be resolved. These unstated (and sometimes ungrounded) feelings can sour good working relationships.

Just as with personality conflicts, values conflicts arise from generational gaps. Young workers often hold different workplace values than older workers –

they’re apt to be more casual in dress and appearance, they’re freer about moving around the office with laptops and tablets, and they’re tech-savvy, often using smartphones even during meetings. They may mistakenly see their older counterparts as behind the times. Older workers, conversely, usually hold a more formal approach to the workplace – they tend to dress and use their workstations in more traditional ways. They may misread their younger counterparts as “aloof” or “disrespectful” when it comes to inter-office encounters.

Leaders Who Listen Control the Conversation

To effectively resolve conflict, there's no better way to lead than to listen. Marlene Chism, consultant, international speaker and the author of *Stop Workplace Drama* and *No-Drama Leadership*, points out that listening requires you to focus on the other person and see things for one moment from their point of view.

"Listening isn't about agreeing, it's about acknowledging the emotion so that the other person feels understood," Chism says. Fevered arguments cool down once each person in a conflict feels acknowledged. When you're caught in such a situation, avoid the temptation to keep arguing the point, jump to conclusions, place blame, spout facts to prove your point, or most of all, take the whole thing too personally.

Leadership listening requires self-discipline, practice and self-mastery. Leaders who really listen stay in control of their emotions, open their minds to curiosity about the other's feelings and acknowledge other people's emotions (even if they don't share them).

Chism emphasizes that when we're really listening during a conflict, we decide where to take the conversation by avoiding being dragged into angry debates or caught off guard by someone else's agenda.

How to Resolve It: Recognize and Celebrate Differences

When you oversee a diverse group, it's important to remember that differing work approaches aren't necessarily the cause of conflict – but failure to accept those differences can be. When they fail to accept the differences, co-workers may insult each other's character and experiences. When insults occur, the conflict intensifies until the right solution is accepted. To cross the generational barrier, follow these steps:

Consider a group discussion. Conflict situations like this that seem to arise out of nowhere would benefit from an informal chat with each group involved. The key as a leader is to recognize the red flags that are alerting you to underlying conflict. For example, during a meeting, you ask for suggestions on a new marketing approach, and notice that when the suggestions are dominated by your younger team members, your veterans clam up.

Help them devise ways to make generation differences work. As a manager, you can't tell your employees individually how to think. But as a leader you can encourage them to find ways to make their generational strengths work for the common good. The next time you see employees arguing over the "best" way to get something accomplished, encourage them to broker a method that combines both more traditional and more modern approaches.

Exercise: Don't Be the (Inadvertent) Cause of Workplace Conflict

Was it something you said? (As a matter of fact, it probably was!) The way we begin conversations, particularly in potentially touchy situations, can have a lot to do with how others respond. Take this exercise to rephrase these “approach” statements into less confrontational ones:

“I’m sure you’re already thinking about this.”

Why it’s confrontational: You’re assuming you know what your listener is thinking before they tell you. And it sounds to others like you’ve already made an assumption on what (or how) they should think.

What works better:

“Tell me if I’m wrong...”

Why it’s confrontational: It creates the presumption that what you’re saying is right and throws up a subtle challenge to your listener to come back with: “Yes, I have to tell you you’re wrong.”

What works better:

“I don’t mean to offend you, but...”

Why it’s confrontational: You’re telling your listener that something’s coming next that will obviously offend them. You put them on the defensive before you say anything, giving them a “heads-up” not to be offended even if you do say something offensive.

What works better:

Exercise: Don't Be the (Inadvertent) Cause of Workplace Conflict (Continued)

“My feeling/understanding is...”

Why it's confrontational: You're putting your assumption(s) before your listener's in a way that says you comprehend something differently (or better) than they do. It's appropriate to use once the discussion has started as a way to explain yourself, but beginning this way asserts your thoughts/ideas before the listener's.

What works better:

“That's a good idea, but...”

Why it's confrontational: Dangling a “but” during a discussion can negate everything that went before it, even if you didn't intend it that way. You're cancelling the person's idea out of hand to make your own statement instead.

What works better:

“I need you to...” or “You need to...”

Why it's confrontational: It comes across as a command rather than a request. Even if we're addressing someone who works for us, it sounds overly demanding, as if we're anticipating an argument.

What works better:

Exercise: Don't Be the (Inadvertent) Cause of Workplace Conflict (Continued)

"I'm not the one who thinks/said this, but..."

Why it's confrontational: You're presenting someone with second- or third-hand information that you know will get a rise out of the listener – but are then trying to discount that person's reaction. It's an indirect and dishonest way to share something, because it degrades whatever you're saying as hearsay or gossip.

What works better:

"Of course, as you know..."

Why it's confrontational: Again, you're subtly strong-arming the person into "knowing" something that you assume, rather than opening with the possibility your listener will have something different to say. It squelches any ideas/thoughts/comments that are contradictory to whatever you've said.

What works better:

How recognizing the four main causes of conflict makes you a better leader

We all encounter conflict situations that could have the potential to spiral out of hand, and end up affecting the productivity and morale of those we work with. Being able to recognize why conflicts can start, and knowing how to resolve them with understanding and patience, shows you're in control and won't allow anger or emotions to get in the way of finding compromise. Likewise, the ability to take charge in a calm and determined manner shows you're able to lead by example, and can defuse rather than escalate the conflict.

You can discover more ways to recognize and prevent workplace conflict, as well as develop other leadership skills, through Progressive Women's Leadership.

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