



## Six key guidelines to manage conflict effectively

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When dealing with a conflict you want to manage it effectively. Conflicts are difficult to resolve as resolutions are rarely reached which everyone is happy with. A conflict that is *well-managed* provides the basis for an approach that everyone will accept, commit to and action. Remember, you want to achieve the best outcomes possible whilst preserving and building on your existing relationships.

There are six things to do:

- 1. Focus on the position, not the person** – you want to focus on what the underlying problem is. Often the other person is not just being difficult but has real and valid reasons for their position. Focus on their position and reasons, don't focus on the person – it makes the disagreement personal and adversarial, and brings people's emotions into play.
- 2. Seek first to understand before you are understood** – focus on where the other person is coming from. Try to understand their thoughts, feelings and position. Once you have understood this, and have checked that your understanding is correct, then you are better positioned to explain your position and to do so from their context,
- 3. Relationships are your first priority** – you need to build mutual understanding and trust. A good relationship is a necessary precursor for a good outcome. If you lack this then you will not achieve a good relationship or a good outcome.
- 4. Listen** – you need to listen actively to what the other person is saying, checking for understanding, clarifying where necessary, and ensuring that what is said is what was heard, and that what was heard was what was meant.
- 5. Jointly establish the objective** – what do you both want to achieve from the conflict? Doing this will allow you to scope out the extent of your conversation, to determine what factors are important and relevant, to help prioritize your goals, and to focus and align your efforts.
- 6. Develop and explore options together** – either or both of your preferred choices may not be suitable or can be improved upon. Creating new options opens the



conversation and stimulates your collective thinking in finding a 'best-fit' alternative on which to agree.

By following these rules, your contentious discussions can be kept positive and constructive, and antagonism and dislike which can exacerbate the conflict can be prevented.