

# How to Foster Healthy Conflict

By Nancy MacKay, PhD  
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Leaders spend significant time on conflict resolution, with conflicts arising from clashes in opinions or interests. Successful resolution prioritizes reconciliation over victory, fostering better decision-making. Leaders play a pivotal role in cultivating environments where healthy conflict thrives, employing adaptable conflict resolution behaviors outlined by the Thomas-Kilmann model to achieve success. Research shows that leaders spend up to one-third of their time resolving conflicts.

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## WHAT IS CONFLICT?

- Disagreement between two or more people.

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## WHAT IS CONFLICT RESOLUTION?

- Resolution does not mean win or lose. It means successful reconciliation. Life is about success, not perfection.

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## WHAT IS HEALTHY CONFLICT?

- Disagreement that results in better decision-making and ideal outcomes.

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## WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF HEALTHY CONFLICT?

- People 'play nice' and tend to avoid or settle too quickly to preserve relationships instead of disagreeing and doing what's best for the business.
- People focus on judgement and win or lose versus the language of agreement

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## WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AS A LEADER IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

- To foster healthy conflict.

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## HOW CAN YOU FOSTER HEALTHY CONFLICT?

- Be an exemplar for adjusting your conflict resolution behaviour during conflict situations.

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## WHAT ARE THE FIVE TYPES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION APPROACHES?

- **Competing:** You want to win. You satisfy your own concerns at the expense of others.
- **Accommodating:** You let the other person win. You sacrifice your own concerns in favour of the other person.
- **Avoiding:** You don't engage in the conflict.
- **Collaborating:** You look for win-win. You try to find a position that would fully satisfy your own and the other's concerns.
- **Compromising:** There is no clear winner or loser. There are gains and losses for each person. Strive for success not perfection.

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## HOW CAN YOU ENHANCE YOUR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS?

- Know when to use each approach and build skills in each approach.
- Each style has advantages and disadvantages.

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## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE CONFLICT-RELATED STRESS?

- Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Never let ego interfere.
- Never hold a grudge or try to even the score.
- Never make it personal.
- Clarify objectives versus alternatives.

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## WHAT ARE THE MAJOR SOURCES OF CONFLICT?

- Who has the decision and who is accountable for results?
- What decision-making approach should I use?
- What are the objectives? Stop making it personal.
- What are the alternatives? Look at benefits, risks and compromise (turf and ego issues).

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## HOW TO RESOLVE 90 PERCENT OF CONFLICTS

- Is this conflict about objectives or alternatives? Get agreement first.
- **Objectives** – Can we compromise? (Can I live with the other person's position? Is this worth fighting for?)
- **Alternatives** – Can I live with the other person's alternative? If not, can I demonstrate benefits and risks? (If not, can we compromise?)

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## WHAT TO DO ABOUT DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOURS?

- Passive-aggressive behaviour: confront it.
- Personality types: stop judging people (adjust your style to get your ideal outcome).
- Bullying: low self-regard – attempt to level the playing field; confront it. • Rumour and gossip: tell people to stop spreading the negativity virus.
- One-upmanship: ego need drives them to always be better than everyone else; respond in the moment.
- Depression: encourage person to seek professional help; not your problem to solve.

## TOP 10 TIPS AND TECHNIQUES ON HOW TO FOSTER HEALTHY CONFLICT

1. Set an example for others.
2. Be factual, never personal and don't generalize.
3. Use observed behaviour, NOT assumptions.
4. Get rid of psychobabble – focus on observed behaviour.
5. Stop judging people.
6. Sacrifice wants to preserve musts.
7. Use the language of agreement.
8. Don't use culture or gender as an excuse.
9. Never let conflict fester.
10. If you are in conflict on a daily basis then you are the problem.

