# **Resolving Workplace (Conflict) Issues**

Conflicts and workplace issues are costly in time and money to any organization. According to industry statistics, over 385 million paid working days are lost each year in the United States due to workplace conflicts and issues. To resolve problems or disputes in the workplace, we first need *to understand* the most common reasons that create problems before fixing them.

## **Common Reasons for Conflict and Issues in the Workplace**

***Communication*** conflicts arise when people have different or insufficient information or disagree over what information is relevant.

***Value*** conflicts are created when people have perceived or actual differences in their beliefs. Conflict will occur when a person tries to impose their values on another. While values may be non-negotiable, they can be discussed, and people can learn to respect others’ values.

***Interest*** conflicts are caused by competition over perceived or actual incompatible needs. Parties often mistakenly believe that to satisfy their own needs, those of others must be sacrificed. An example would be an employee who was hired on the condition they would work 4-day, 10-hour shifts. Others may be on a 5-day, 8-hour shift, and they do not think the other person with the 4/10 work schedule is fair and should give it up.

***Relationship*** conflicts often occur when there are misperceptions or poor communication. One person may distrust the other and believe that their actions are meant to harm them. Relationship conflicts can be resolved through the open discussion process.

***Interdependence*** happens when a person relies on someone else's cooperation or output for them to get their job done. For example, an office manager who handles a precinct road and bridge office is consistently late producing a monthly report about maintenance activities completed by the precinct. This causes the County Engineer to be late with his reports to the Commissioners Court that creates conflict.

***Differences in Style*** often happen because people have different ways to get things done. One person may want to get the work done quickly (task-oriented) and move on to the next task as quickly as possible. At the same time, another person is more concerned about ensuring that everyone has a say in how the work gets done (people-oriented).

***Differences in Background/Gender*** conflicts can arise because of generational gaps, educational backgrounds, unique skill sets, gender, or political preferences. This can be overcome through diversity training of all employees in the workplace.

***Differences in Leadership Style*** are caused by managers having different ways of leading their teams. Team members who must deal with various leaders throughout the day can become confused and upset from other ways of being led. For example, one leader may involve his people more in doing things, while another may be more directive. Avoiding this problem can be accomplished by ensuring that your managers have a set of principles and values they all follow. They need to be consistent in making decisions and involving people in their daily operations.

 ***Personality Clashes*** are often the most significant cause of conflict in the workplace. These types of conflict in the workplace are usually caused by emotions and perceptions about somebody else's motives or character. For example, a team leader calls out an employee for being late because they perceive the employee as lazy and disrespectful. The employee sees the team leader as out to “get them” because they aren’t one of the “favored children.”

## **Conflict and Issue Resolution Tips**

So now that we know the leading causes of issues and conflict in the workplace, what can we do to be more productive and set aside differences?

***Communication*** issues can be overcome by allowing sufficient time to be heard respectfully and not cutting off others when trying to convey an idea or information. All employees should be encouraged to participate in respectful meaningful communication instead of keeping things inside and possibly exploding later.

***Values*** from one person to another may be non-negotiable; however, they can be discussed, and people can learn to live peacefully and coherently alongside each other. Diversity training may be an essential element for all employees to learn to accept the different values we all possess.

***Interest*** conflicts can be overcome by identifying ways to dovetail interests and create opportunities for mutual gain.

***Relationship*** conflicts may be addressed by allowing uninterrupted time to talk through the issues and respond to the other person’s concerns.

***Interdependence*** conflicts can often be overcome by ensuring that people handle their delegation skills, authority, and ability. Yes, you can delegate laterally and upward, not just down.

***Differences in style*** can be overcome by all parties agreeing on how to handle a particular task or project. With an open exchange of ideas, the two opposite parties can explore a common ground or collaborate on approaching the task or project that meets the needs.

***Differences in Background/Gender*** can be overcome through diversity training of all employees in the workplace. Another approach that can be used is to share their cultural background with others when approaching holiday events. An example would be Hispanics sharing what Cinco de Mayo is about with others.

***Differences in Leadership style*** can be overcome by management using a robust set of principles and values they all follow. Then, most importantly, they use them to provide consistency in making decisions and involving people in the organization’s daily operations.

***Simple, honest conversations among all worker’s best-overcome personality clashes***. They should be encouraged to respectfully approach others and tell them how they perceived action against them and how they took it. Simply talking the problem through will often resolve it before it turns into a crisis.

For any conflict or issue to be effectively resolved, it takes the ***cooperation and willingness of all parties to be a part of the solution,*** or they will individually continue to be a source of the problem.