Resolve Conflict Before it Escalates into Violence



WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Operations are undergoing near constant change in many facilities to help increase productivity, improve safety and reduce waste. Workers may feel strongly about their opinions, or have a hard time adapting to change. Conflict is to be expected in this fast-paced work environment.

Hundreds, sometimes even thousands of workers perform their duties inside the same facility, which can increase the likelihood of a conflict turning into large-scale instance of workplace violence.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

In a manufacturing facility, possibilities for conflict are endless. Here are a few you might recognize:

- Disagreements about equipment use or protocol.
- Shift scheduling.
- Division of work.
- Annoyance about others’ work habits and personal habits.
- Unclear directions and other instances of poor communication.
- Great workers with terrible people skills.
- Language barriers.
- Work cliques and favoritism.
- Stress from overwork and shiftwork.

Workplace conflict must be managed wisely so it does not cause harm. Conflict causes significant stress for workers. Avoiding conflict is also a common cause of worker absences. And conflict can easily lead to violence.

Example

In September of 2012, several workers at a plant that manufactures parts for several large technology companies were involved in a dispute that took a turn for the worse.

If another worker or a supervisor had intervened to help resolve the conflict, the story might have ended there. Instead, the dispute escalated into an all-out riot with 40 people taken to hospital.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Clearing up a misunderstanding is sometimes all that is needed to end a conflict. Here are some tips for settling an interpersonal conflict peacefully:

- Learn to fight fair and how to deal with the problem, not the person.
- The more secure you are about yourself, the less likely you'll feel under attack and become defensive when someone confronts you. Take a course or read some books on improving self-esteem.
- If you must speak out over an issue, think about how you are going to handle it before the words tumble from your mouth. Write down what you want to achieve.
- Avoid being rigid about what others should or shouldn't do to suit you. Remember, others think quite differently.
- Watch your body language during a "discussion." Breathe, relax and face the person head on, maintaining neutral eye contact.
- Ask open questions to find out what the other person expects from a situation and then calmly summarize that person's viewpoint to make sure you understand it.
- If the discussion escalates and you find yourself getting angry, stop arguing and agree to meet at another time to discuss it after you've both cooled off.

Find out what resources are available to help you resolve conflicts. Will your human resources department lend a hand? Can you take training in conflict management and dealing with aggression? How about diversity training to help you understand cultural clashes?

FINAL WORD

An ideal conclusion to a conflict is one which leaves everyone happy. A more realistic conclusion is one in which the parties can co-exist without further conflict.