The Time for Tact, Not Attack



Safety Talk

How do you handle conflict? Do you get angry and say things you wish you hadn’t? Or do you back down and regret you did not stand up for yourself?

Conflict is a normal part of human relationships, even in the workplace. How you handle conflict helps determine your success and even your safety on the job.

You aren’t going to agree with or like everyone you meet at work. You might disagree seriously with a co-worker about the right way to do something. You might feel he or she is trying to undermine your position. Or there could be somebody who makes you feel annoyed all the time. Situations such as these can lead to anger, accidents and even violence if you don’t handle them properly.

In trying to develop positive responses to conflict, it helps to identify some of the responses that can make the situation worse:

- Seething with resentment instead of dealing with the issue.
- Being pleasant face-to-face but speaking critically about another person behind his or her back.
- Lapsing into feelings of helplessness and depression over conflicts.
- Getting mad and over-reacting to the situation.

Now consider some of these strategies for handling conflict:

- Think clearly about the issue, separating the facts of the matter from the feelings. Try to understand the root of the problem. For example, if a worker is picking on you about your performance, he may be unhappy about criticism he is getting from the boss.
- Accept your own responsibility in the conflict and acknowledge the other person’s role. If you have made a mistake, admit it.
- State your case clearly and calmly. Say what you want and need others to do. “Please don’t interrupt me when I am talking to a customer,” is a reasonable thing to say, for instance.
- Be diplomatic. While you need to be honest and forthright, you also must respect the other person’s feelings. There is no need to humiliate another worker.
- Look for mutually acceptable solutions, keeping in mind your

responsibilities for working safely and serving your company’s customers well. Many conflicts arise over shift assignments and vacation schedules. Work with your supervisor to accommodate your fellow workers.
- Keep your cool. If you are too emotional to speak calmly, postpone the conversation until you are back in control. “I’d really like to talk about this some more. Can I see you at the end of the shift?”
- Be assertive. Speak up for your rights and your beliefs. “Driving the lift truck that fast is dangerous for everyone. I am going to have to talk to the boss about this.”
- Leave your work worries behind when you go home. Don’t brood about them in your spare time.

You are not going to get along with everyone. Your co-workers have their own agendas and motivations which aren’t necessarily to make things easy for you. Learn to handle conflict calmly and confidently.