

Don't let work conflicts take you down

Whether it's a co-worker who won't stop walking off with your supplies or a serious dispute about a project, here are some steps that can keep conflicts from becoming bigger problems.

Maintain perspective. "Don't treat each conflict as a catastrophe," says Jane Cote, academic director of the Carson College of Business at Washington State University at Vancouver. "Conflict in the workplace is common, and if treated as a crisis it elevates it to an emotional space that is hard to reconcile with reasonable action." Avoid emotional reactions by staying calm before approaching the other party, and remember that a public outburst rarely results in a positive resolution, she says.

Consider the other person's motivations. Before you confront the other person or jump to state your own case, think about why he or she did or said the thing that upset you. Maybe they were rushed, were simply trying to get something done or had a different set of priorities and values than you, says Tina Mertel, a business coach and founder of Meaningful Coaching.

Communicate effectively. "Start your communication in ways that don't put the other person in defense mode," Mertel says. For example, she suggests saying: "Thank you, can I check something out with you?" or "I'm getting a lot out of working on this project; one thing that could help it go smoother is ...". You should seek common ground with the other person when trying to resolve a conflict, Cote says.