

Defuse a mounting conflict

If an underlying tension exists between you and an employee, now's the time to address it. Sure, it's easier to ignore it. But it may mushroom into a distraction that just won't go away. Slight discomfort will turn into snide remarks, and a rift will soon set in that's too deep to repair.

Use these techniques to reverse the momentum of mounting conflict:

Be direct. Many managers reject this obvious step and choose not to level with someone when they're peeved. Yet once you harbor negative feelings toward a colleague, chances are you'll start to look for other "evidence" to reinforce those feelings. It's smarter to let the individual know that you're upset. Find a good time to say in a polite tone, "There's something I want to discuss with you, and my goal in getting it off my chest is to help both of us work together better."

Admit any error. Before you open up to the other person, consider to what extent you can take responsibility for contributing to the problem. Maybe you misunderstood something or you acted in such a way as to trigger his reaction.

Focus on agreement. If your personality clashes dramatically with someone working closely with you, don't just shrug and accept that the two of you must remain at odds. Find traits or beliefs that you hold in common and discuss them. Say, "We're very different people, but we share a goal of...." That becomes your springboard for establishing a positive relationship.