

'He said, she said': Train staff in workplace conflict resolution

What's a manager to do when faced with conflicting accounts of an argument between employees? An important part of that answer is to resolve the **conflict** quickly, before it spreads like a cancer through your organization.

That's what happened after an argument erupted between two top managers in Hillsborough County, Florida's Fleet Management Department. It began with a dispute over usage of a fleet car and blew up in a series of conflicts resulting in one manager's firing and a federal sexual discrimination case.

HR investigated the incidents, but the issue came down to two conflicting stories. The department put the male manager involved on suspension and later asked him to apologize. When he refused, the county fired him. Then he filed an EEOC suit alleging an "extremely hostile work environment" in which female managers are "constantly disciplining males."

Advice: It helps to set civility rules in the workplace that apply to everyone, male and female, management and line employees. You may even consider bringing in experts to train everyone in **conflict resolution**. There's a right way to resolve conflict and a wrong way. Teach the right way, and punish those who insist on bullying.