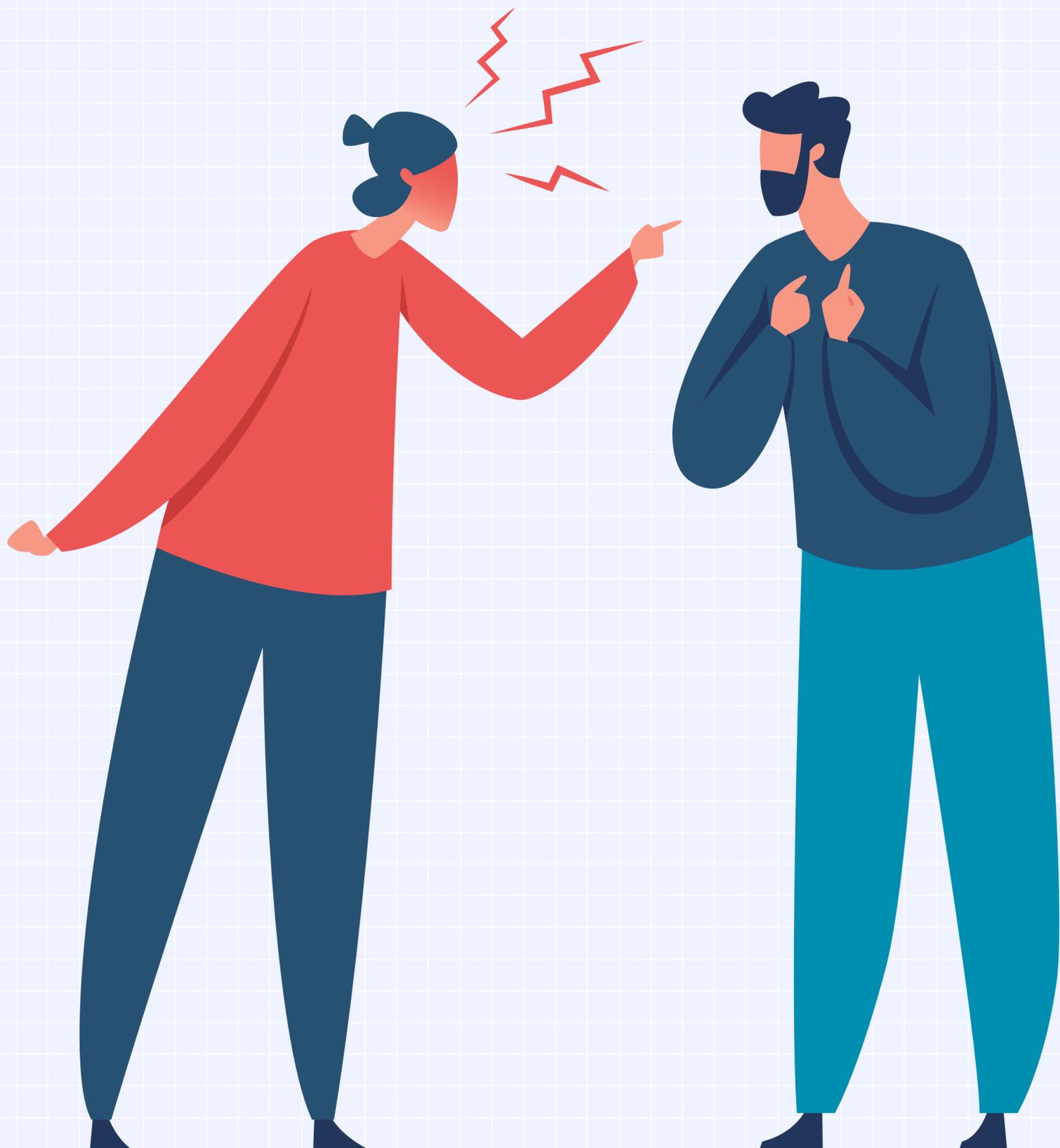




Health & Wellbeing
Office of the President



Managing Conflicts and Difficult People



Understanding Conflict

Experiencing workplace conflict might happen from time to time throughout our careers.

But before we attempt to deal with such conflicts, we need to understand and determine what type of conflict it is because different types of conflict would require different sets of responses.

Hot conflict occurs when one or more parties are highly emotional (i.e., being physically aggressive and threatening or using incendiary language).

Cold conflict occurs when one or more parties seem to suppress emotions or appear unemotional (i.e., remaining silent or speaking passively-aggressively).

Undoubtedly, neither of these types of conflict is constructive, affecting both team morale and productivity. Thus, it is necessary to learn and practice conflict resolution as a skill in the workplace.



Managing Conflict

Once you have recognized it as either a hot or cold conflict, here are some dynamics for you to understand behind each type of conflict.

If the conflict is hot:¹

Seek consent from all parties before bringing them together to discuss their conflict, and set appropriate ground rules.

If the conflict is cold:¹

Seek consent before bringing individuals in the conflict together to engage in constructive communication.

The role of a facilitator in such situations is crucial to "warm up" the parties involved, which may turn into a "hot conflict".

Acknowledging responsibility as being partly responsible for the conflict, particularly as an opening—can be effective because it immediately focuses attention but without provocation, on the difficult things the speaker needs to say and the listener needs to hear.

Whether the conflict is hot or cold, the goal should be to focus on bridging the divide and innovating new options or solutions. Bridging means creating stronger ties and deeper trust between the former antagonists.



Actionable Steps

1

Avoid name-calling and finger-pointing. Focus on the problem, not the person.

2

Consider calling in a third party. Someone who is not involved in the conflict may be able to provide a vital alternate perspective for both parties.

3

Check the temperature gauge. If the conflict is still too hot, don't try to resolve it right away. Agree to come back when things have cooled.

4

Consider what's motivating their behaviour. Sometimes, putting ourselves in someone else's shoes can be helpful too!



Difficult People

Do you have someone in your life who regularly triggers you?

Perhaps they take credit for the work you've done?

Acts like a know-it-all? Constantly criticizes you?

The painful truth about the people who trigger you is this: In all likelihood, you're not going to change them.

The only person you have the possibility of changing is yourself.

Each of us has a default lens through which we see the world. We perceive it as reality, but it's a selective filter, and we have the power to view the world through other lenses.

There are two options worth trying out when you find yourself defaulting to negative emotions.

Read on to find out more on the next page!



Actionable Steps

The Reverse Lens²

This lens requires viewing the world through the lens of the person who triggered you. It doesn't mean sacrificing your point of view but instead widening your perspective.

For example, you can ask yourself "What is this person feeling, and in what ways does that make sense?"

The Realistic Optimism Lens²

Using this lens requires asking yourself two simple questions when you feel you're being treated badly or unfairly.

The first one is, "What are the facts in this situation?"

The second is, "What's the story I'm telling myself about those facts?"

Making this distinction allows you to stand outside your experience rather than simply reacting to it. It also opens the possibility that whatever story you're currently telling yourself isn't necessarily the the only way to look at your situation.



Non-violent communication techniques

Our choice of language³ also plays a pivotal role in conflict resolution.

When resolving conflicts, the number one rule is to avoid starting a conversation with the word you.

Using "you" will immediately put the other person on the defensive.

Doing so may result in anger, yelling, hurling accusations back and forth, or someone stomping off.

When you are having an issue with another person and decide to discuss it with him or her, it is difficult to have a productive conversation when you lead off with an accusatory statement or one that sounds as though you are blaming the person for the problem.

Here's a sample phrase for reference:

"I have something I want to talk to you about. Yesterday during our meeting, I became upset when I was in the middle of my presentation and you disagreed with what I was saying. That really threw me off track for the rest of my presentation."

In this instance, stating what happened and painting the picture of how the person's behaviour affected you is helpful as the other person is likely to focus on your feelings. Furthermore, you would reduce the need for them to defend themselves!

Language

You can follow up an “I” phrase with a phrase of understanding in situations in which the other person did not take responsibility for his or her actions or does not seem to understand your feelings.

Possible Phrases:

“I realize that it may not have been done on purpose”

“Thank you for the conversation, I can now appreciate that it was not intended to sound in that way.”

You can also use a phrase of understanding when you have an aha moment.

Incorporating a phrase of understanding at that point will productively move the conversation along.

Possible Phrases:

“Now I see where you're coming from.”

“I understand the situation from your viewpoint now.”



References

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