

# Supervisor/HR Newsletter

*Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program*

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## How to be Comfortable with Conflict



If you are going to be a good role model and lead by example, you will have to get comfortable with confronting conflict.

The problem is that as much as leaders express their discomfort with conflict, they are even more averse to confronting it. For this reason, it is a good idea to understand that there is a difference between confronting a conflict and being directly engaged in it.

The word “conflict” can conjure up a host of definitions and interpretations.

As with anything in life, your understanding of this word results from your experiences of being confronted and confronting others. When most people think about confronting another person, they typically think about a face-to-face argument or a fight of some kind. This means that aggression is involved and there will be a loser and a winner. Fear enters the picture.

A win-or-lose attitude naturally evokes all the fears that you may have about conflict and how successfully you face it. This perspective to confrontation might emphasize the importance of winning or compel you to consider avoiding conflict altogether.

I strongly suggest that you broaden your definition of the word “confront,” recognizing its more positive and constructive meaning. By doing so, you become more conscious of your choices and much more effective.

Let’s start with the full definition of the word. At its root, the word “confront” means to face something. The act of confronting is facing and dealing with a problem or difficult situation.

## How to be Comfortable with Conflict *continued...*



To become more familiar with the constructive and positive aspect of this word, here are some synonymous meanings:

- \* To address.
- \* To come to grips with.
- \* To tackle.
- \* To see to.
- \* To grapple with.
- \* To handle.
- \* To attend to.
- \* To manage.

### **The Missing Word**

To this list, I suggest you add “to lead.”

The definition I like to use when coaching leaders and in my workshops is “to face the truth.” Rather than thinking of conflict as a form of separation and a means to hostility and combativeness, I suggest you think of it as an invitation to the party you are in conflict with, asking them to participate in exploring the real issues and challenges that need to be discussed.

To succeed in encouraging others to play differently demands a significant shift in your thinking. Based on your experiences and learning, you might assume that others are apt to be aggressive during conflict and, therefore, you must counter forcefully. Consciously changing your thinking means using confrontation as a path to a more collaborative dialogue.

When thinking about the more constructive and positive view of confrontation, you will also find it useful to identify and come to terms with the various forms of avoidance you may be using. Avoidance is a tempting proposition. Yet if your aim is to lead an innovative and open culture, there is no room for it.

Source: <http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/45048/how-to-be-comfortable-with-conflict>

# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.



**Q. I documented my employee's performance issues and came back the next day to look at what I had written. I have to admit that the emotions really came through in the wording. I am glad I let it "cool down" overnight. Is it a good idea to let documentation sit for a day or two?**

A. If you are not facing an immediate deadline, then it is a good idea to give yourself extra time. The relationship with your employee can be stressful, so your emotions can come through in your documentation. It is easier to spot problems with your documentation the next day. Remove your documentation's emotional content so it does not undermine your goal. For example, eliminate diagnostic judgments like "he is passive aggressive" or "she acts depressed," and remove character labels like "lazy,"

"inconsiderate," "immature," etc. These phrases undermine documentation. You are documenting for the employee's benefit, but be clear with details and facts so if management needs to act on the documentation, they clearly can follow it. Do not discuss the intrapsychic reasons your employee behaves the way he or she does. Focus on when, who, where, how, why, etc. Your HR advisor and/or EAP can also consult with you on documentation.

**Q. My employee misses a lot of work. There are rumors he has a compulsive gambling problem, but I have no direct knowledge of this. When I make a supervisory referral for absenteeism, should I mention the possible gambling? I am worried the employee won't be truthful and the EAP will be fooled.**

A. There are two paths to resolution. One is your employee shares the nature of his gambling problem if it exists, so proper assessment and referral to effective help can be made by the EAP. The other is he does not share the reason for his attendance problem, which will eventually force the organization to take action if the problem becomes intolerable. If the latter occurs, another offer of EAP assistance may produce strong motivation because of the threat to job security. More employees would be salvaged if this principle were understood by business organizations. Denial is strong with certain problems like addictive diseases such as gambling. However, employees in crisis will avail themselves of help. In a phone consult, tell the EAP what you have heard about the gambling. The EAP will keep this information in mind when conducting the assessment, using the information as appropriate.

**Q. It's frequently hard for me to delegate and let go. How can I become more adept at trusting my employees with assignments without controlling or hovering over them?**

A. Allowing those you supervise to manage their work without exerting control appears to create anxiety for you. Your first step toward change is to understand that your controlling behavior feels like domination, and it's disrespectful to your employees. It doesn't feel helpful and supportive. Some people learn controlling behaviors early in life from others who played significant roles in their lives. Others learn them by having to rely on themselves to meet basic needs or to feel safe in unsafe environments. There are many reasons a person exerts overly controlling behaviors, but work with your EAP. It can help you implement a simple plan for letting go that may help you meet your goal, find more balance, and be happier in your job.

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