

# CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

## Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

### Expert Advice to Resolve Workplace Discord

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Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

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### Truth or Resolution?

It was as if an irresistible button was flashing in front of Marilyn, inscribed with the words “Slam If Heather Lies.” Slam it she did. “No,” Marilyn said. “You spoke to Henry—behind my back—before our executive meeting on October third.” Later, she said, “Wrong! You never apologized to me directly until the CEO intervened and forced you to.” Stretch this over a two-hour interpersonal workplace mediation session and you’ll sense the meeting’s senselessness.

It’s tempting to react the way Marilyn did. People in conflict typically believe they are the aggrieved party and are, therefore, “in the right.” Marilyn’s strategy was to correct Heather’s wrongs by pointing out each error or omission. Unfortunately, because both sides believe they’re right and both sides point out the other’s mistakes, this common conflict behavior is among the key tributaries that contribute to a flood of conflict. The cycle of denouncing the other’s “lies” becomes a perpetual motion machine.

Paraphrasing the great physicist Niels Bohr, the opposite of one truth is often another truth. This paradox is entwined throughout interpersonal conflict

because both sides believe they see reality while the other side distorts it. This dynamic can lead to each side pushing the “liar button” in reaction to the other’s reality. What can we do to resolve the dilemma?

Simplifying this problem, there are two choices. The first is that the disputants can make their case by highlighting the other’s dishonesties as a way to ensure their own version of what “really” happened becomes the dominant story. The second choice involves focusing attention on the parties’ underlying goals.

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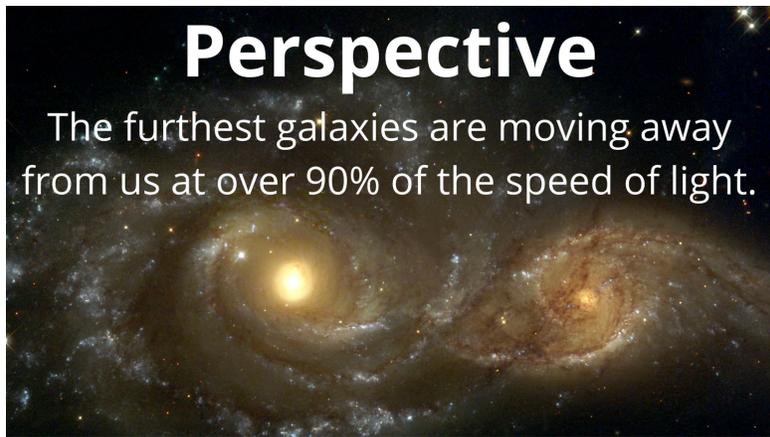


**Big Conflict? In-Accord helps**  
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We have found that by the time a case gets to us, the most meaningful prize is the ability for each side to develop a collaborative working relationship with the other. At times, the mediator's role is helping participants realize they jeopardize this goal when they fixate on determining every truth and lie. Our most successful clients add qualifiers to their statements, such as "At least that's how I see it" or "I know you may have a different point of view" or "It's interesting you interpreted it that way because I thought it was about...." We foster this type of provisional thinking to help people successfully hybridize different interpretations of events and statements.

In the mediation between Marilyn and Heather, we helped Marilyn see that she could either try to win an argument or she could try to heal an important relationship (along with focusing on the related issues of her reputation, effectiveness within the company, and so on). Eventually, over the course



# Perspective

The furthest galaxies are moving away from us at over 90% of the speed of light.

of several mediation sessions, she was able to resist the temptation to point out each of Heather's historical offenses and instead accept that a relationship isn't like a boxing match—it's not something you can win.

### Note:

We don't judge if ferreting out the truth is the most important goal for an individual or organization. We understand that an objective determination of the facts can be a valid path to a solution. However, we have found that such an approach is not compatible with facilitated dialogue and negotiation efforts to improve working relationships.

## Individual Coaching for Professionals

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"The purpose of professional coaching is to up-level emotional intelligence, increase self-awareness, strengthen self-regulation and bring new and best results to teams, companies, and bottom lines. Corollary goals are to enhance social-regulation and the social-management of oneself at work and in life. It is the client's responsibility to be willing to step into the coaching and learn, change, and integrate these new ways of communicating and performing. While the coach 'holds the space' for their results, the client must form the alliance and empower the relationship with the coach for their success. It is always a private process to ensure that the coachee feels safe enough to share their truth and then practice the new skills throughout their work and even in their daily life. When clients discover how to 'language' emotional intelligence in conversations and situations, the results are often transformative."



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