

# CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

## Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

### Expert Advice to Resolve Workplace Discord

Volume 8, Issue 3



**Abby Chroman**  
Consultant

### Discuss Behavior, Not Issues

Hoshi looked at me in exasperation while Kurt sank back in his chair, both signaling hopelessness. We were an hour and a half into the second session of a challenging workplace resolution effort. Hoshi and Kurt were leaders in their organization but could seldom work together without their professional disagreements devolving into assumed personal affronts or suspected power plays. As occasionally happens, the mediation effort was sloshing through a swamp of molasses, going nowhere.

At such times, it can be helpful to switch to a fresh topic on which progress might be possible. If you've done your preparatory work with the people in conflict, you'll have developed a simple and neutral list of topics from which to pick another item for discussion. While you'll eventually need to resume your efforts to resolve issue A, the task will be easier if the participants have experienced a breakthrough on issue B. With this in mind, I suggested, "Since it's been challenging to develop agreements about how to coordinate to meet the quarterly deadline, let's focus on the decision-making issue that's on your list of other topics."

I'd like to say this was the session's beautiful breakthrough moment. I'd like to report that after they developed an elegant and heartfelt agreement about decision-making protocols, Kurt suggested a solution to the deadline issue, which Hoshi modified slightly and to which they both agreed. However, that isn't what happened. Instead, they took another five-star tour to the swampy morass. Their disagreements about decision-making became as sticky as their tussle over meeting deadlines.

I know things are looking bleak for Hoshi and Kurt, but don't worry—this tip sheet is called "Conflict Solutions." There's always another option. The next alternative I tried was a technique entitled "Discuss Behavior, Not Issues." During heated exchanges, it's easy to become so fixated on the issues that we don't consider how they're being discussed. As a savvy resolver, you can set aside the discussion topics and shift attention to the ways in

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### Perspective:



**Over a lifetime, your heart beats 2.5 billion times and pumps 54,000,000 gallons.**



**Chris Sheesley, MA**  
Conflict Resolver

**IN-ACCORD**  
Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

1327 SE Tacoma St. #132  
Portland, OR 97202  
503-723-9982  
info@inaccordnw.com



# Expanded Services!



In-Accord is here to help your organization come back from the pandemic. We're still thriving and always ready to fix your workplace conflicts. In addition, we've enhanced or added these services:

- Professional/executive coaching
- Expanded trainings
- Team facilitation
- General HR services

Whew! No wonder we've been hiring new consultants, mediators, facilitators, trainers and assistants.

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which the individuals are communicating. This pivot removes the pressure of trying to fix tangible, thorny problems instead of how they're being mishandled. This change in direction serves as a shortcut to explore an ever-important—and larger—issue: the overall quality of the working relationship itself.

In our current case study, I said, "Hoshi and Kurt, let's set aside these specific issues about deadlines and decision-making protocols for a moment and talk about how your conversation is going. It seems you're both getting frustrated with each other and are on the brink of giving up. I can't help but wonder if this is how things generally go when you try to work together. It seems that the more impactful opportunity here is to consider what you can do to prevent your conversations from getting to this point."

I'd like to say that this was the session's beautiful breakthrough moment. I'd like to report that by focusing their attention on how they want to be treated and how they want to treat each other, they established a more professional and collegial

working relationship. I'd like to say this blazed a path for resolution of more tangible issues like deadlines and decision-making. And I can, because that is exactly what happened.



Honestly, there's not much we can do about this...

But workplace conflict?  
We can fix that!