

CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

Expert Advice to Resolve Workplace Discord

June 2023

A Conflict Resolution Fable

Once upon a recent time, in a thriving city, there was a successful advertising agency. The company had a diverse team of wildly talented individuals working in tandem to create captivating ad campaigns. This is where our tale begins.

One day, during a joint staff meeting, a conflict between two critical employees crept into the open. Serena and James were both leaders in the creative department. She was an imaginative and detail-oriented graphic designer who was looked up to by many, while he was a persuasive and confident copywriter whose opinion was highly valued. Although they'd worked well together for many years, their ability to collaborate had been quietly fraying at the edges. Then, they openly bickered in the public spotlight.

The discord had first flickered to life when James began feeling that Serena dominated their joint projects. Being a sensitive and creative spirit, he took it poorly when she devalued his input and dismissed his creative ideas on a particularly high-profile project. James's frustration grew, and he became less motivated to work with Serena. This caused simmering tension and deteriorated the quality of their work. Serena had no idea what was amiss and attributed his withdrawal to issues

in his personal life. After the dynamic went on display for all to see, it affected their productivity and their service to the agency's most important client. The conflict rippled across their respective teams, and people took sides.

James and Serena each began a private campaign of seemingly endless one-on-one meetings with their supervisors, the HR Director, and even the CEO. This previously undetected dispute quickly became a central feature of leadership's weekly time commitments. The leadership team proffered advice ranging from "take some time apart to cool off" to "get together over coffee and work it out." However, emotions were high, both parties had taken deep offense, and reconciliation was not so easy to craft. Recognizing the problem's scale, impact, and apparent intractability, management enlisted the help of In-Accord, an experienced, specialized conflict resolution consultancy.

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The mediator's first step was to help both Serena and James feel heard and understood. For example, James shared that he felt undervalued and ignored, explaining how this impacted his morale and productivity. The mediator then guided them to consider how they might each be contributing to the situation—an important insight beyond casting blame. For her part, Serena, who was initially defensive, eventually acknowledged that she had unintentionally neglected James's contributions. Through these steady efforts, both Serena and James became more skillful self-advocates who were equipped with new insights, a broader range of options, and more constructive approaches to conflict management.

From there, they engaged in a safe and neutral facilitated dialogue and negotiation process to create a more successful, positive working relationship. This new relationship was based on recognizing that their differing work styles and failures to communicate were at the root of their entanglement. James and Serena established new communication protocols to ensure improved collaboration, and they agreed to hold regular brainstorming sessions to freely exchange ideas while also respecting each other's input. Serena recognized the importance of involving James in decision-making and vowed to actively seek his input for their joint projects. As a bonus, they each cultivated better skills and increased confidence to navigate relationship challenges across their work lives, rather than avoiding conflict, mismanaging interpersonal issues, or drawing others into their fray.

And yes, they lived happily ever after. (Seriously—they're still doing well six months later).



Excerpt from our most recent blog:

What is Impartiality in mediation? A decision to operate, at least temporarily, in a manner that supports all parties equally and respects their right to choose their own solution.

This approach is intended to allow the ideas of the most directly involved people – the employees in the conflict - to emerge. This process is designed to offer them a process to explore the spectrum of issues and interests before them fully. Therefore, it's helpful to refrain from allowing the participants to become attached to particular solutions early in the process. Even more damaging to resolution is when the facilitator becomes attached to her own solution for the parties.

Read more here: <https://www.inaccordnw.com/adopt-impartiality/>

The quality of our lives depends not on whether or not we have conflicts, but how we respond to them.

-Thomas Crum

