

# CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

## Fixing Interpersonal Conflict at Work

### Expert Advice to Resolve Workplace Discord

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Conflict Resolver

### Preparing for Resolution

Because I use an early stage, interactive process, most of my cases are well along the resolution path by the time I bring fractious employees to the negotiation table. Here are three steps you can use before (or even instead of) bringing employees together to work through their dispute. These activities will establish a pathway to resolution, provide you with valuable foreknowledge, and engage the employees in constructive preparations that will allow them to work through the conflict.

**1) Convert complaints into proposals.** People are adept at complaining about what they don't like and what they don't want. It's more challenging for them to translate that negativity into what they do want. As the conflict resolver, it's helpful for you to know the collage of complaints the parties are lodging against each other. But, it's more potent to help them understand and then articulate what they want from one another. Separately ask both employees what they would like from the other party. The following question embodies this approach: "You mentioned that you don't like it when Moriah shows up at your office insisting on having a meeting immediately. What, specifically, would you like her to do differently when she has an urgent matter to discuss?"

**2) Help to develop attractive proposals.** Once you've helped the employee to craft proposals that could resolve the conflict, the next step is to test the viability of those ideas. While the proposal may sound ideal to the person you're coaching, it's important to consider the other party's likely reaction. It's comic how frequently I ask the proposal-crafter, "How do you think Moriah will respond to that idea?" and the instantaneous reply is, "Oh, she'll say no!" Since you want people to say "yes" to each other, your task is to help each person to devise proposals that will be attractive to the other side. You can accomplish this with questions such as, "If you know in advance she'll refuse that request, why ask for it? What other request could you make that'll meet your need and that Moriah will likely accept?" In sum, step two encourages employees to frame proposals in ways that are likely to be acceptable to the other person.

**3) Quid pro quo.** By this time you reach this step, you've helped the employee to convert frustrations and dislikes into concrete and plausible requests. *(continued)*

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*(continued)*

The final step is to help both sides consider what the other party might ask for in exchange. Your task can be illustrated with this question: "You plan to ask Moriah to call first and make sure you're available to meet with her before she arrives at your office with an urgent matter. What do you think she'll ask for in return?" Another version is, "Knowing what you do about why Moriah comes to you with urgent requests, what can you offer so that she'll agree to your proposal?" These questions prepare your employees for the fact that the engine of negotiation is an active give-and-take process.

### **Conclusion**

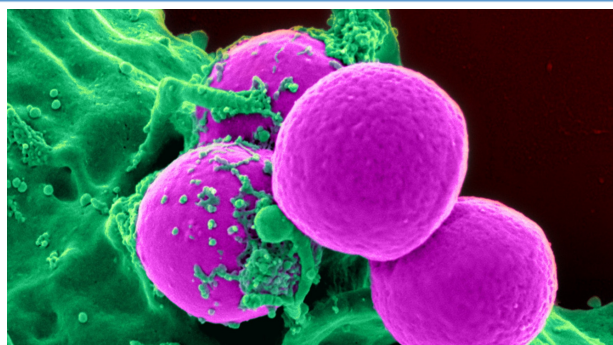
By recognizing the role that intentional preparation plays in effective conflict resolution, you can play an active role in preparing employees for the discussions and negotiations in which they're about to engage.

### **Award of Excellence**

The Oregon Mediation Association unanimously presented its 2016 Award of Excellence, in the private practitioner category, to Chris Sheesley. This award for outstanding service "recognizes individuals or organizations who have demonstrated exemplary service to the field of mediation and to OMA."

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### **Perspective:**

**There are 100 million times  
more bacteria in the ocean than  
stars in the universe.**