

# CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

## Expert Advice to Resolve Workplace Discord

February 2023

### Ten Insights for Conflict Resolvers

To advise and train leaders in the important and nuanced skills required to solve conflicts among employees, we've distilled our guiding concepts into 10 principles. These are outlined below in hopes of helping you successfully bring healing to fractured working relationships and renewed refocus on the organizational mission. Good luck out there, and we'll be here if you need us.

1. **Questions, not statements:** When stepping into the interaction, it is often best to craft and pose questions rather than making declarations. Most of what you say should have a question mark at the end.
2. **Do not judge:** While you will feel judgments arising as you listen to each side and watch them interact, remember that your role is to help them communicate and heal their relationship. The most successful path forward is to be impartial. Don't compound the situation by inserting your opinions and reactions into an already complicated mix.
3. **Focus on needs:** People in conflict often frame their points of view regarding formulated positions (e.g. "You need to do X"). Such stances often obscure their true

needs. The savvy facilitator helps parties resolve surface issues by finding ways to name and satisfy their underlying needs.

4. **Summarize, then ask:** Sitting between two warring colleagues can be daunting. You are balancing many threads at once (i.e. emotions, facts, history, proposals). If you are uncertain about what to do in a given moment, simply summarize what's been shared or what has occurred in the meeting, and then ask a question. This technique provides a break, time for reflection, and the opportunity to redirect the process.

5. **Encourage direct dialogue:** A key goal of facilitated conflict resolution is for the involved participants to communicate effectively. It is wise,

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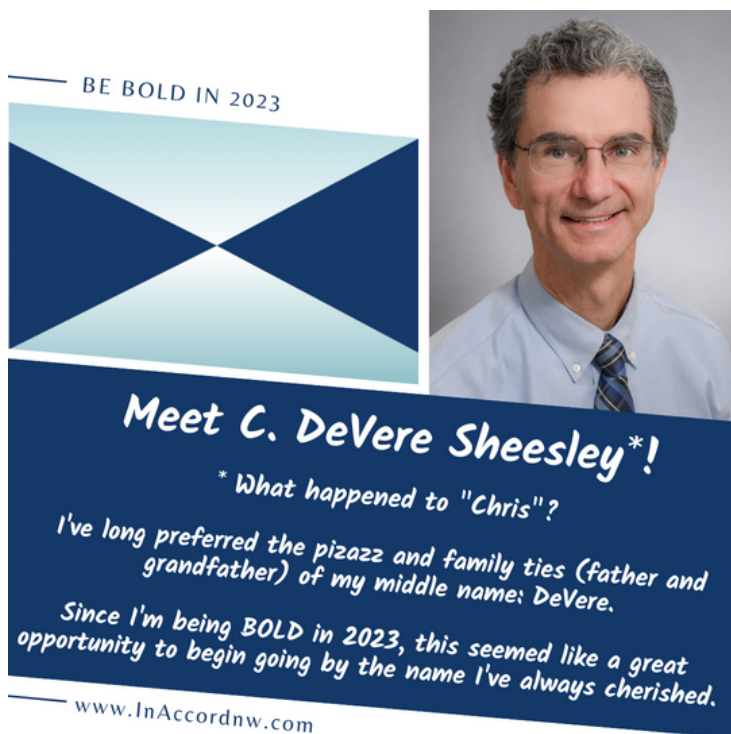
therefore, to either stay out of their way when they are talking or manage their dialogue with the primary goal in mind of maximizing their willingness and ability to talk with each other.

6. **Quiet:** Success is inversely proportional to how much you say.

7. **Heat-seeking:** A common instinct is to avoid or whitewash moments of overt tension or avoidance. However, when facilitating tense discussions and negotiations, move toward the hottest topics. The heat you see is a beacon highlighting where you should focus your attention and interventions.

8. **Pivot to the future:** Help parties consider how to change their future behavior and create a preferred working relationship. Which person may have been right or wrong is less important than what will enhance their future interactions for working together successfully.

9. **Resist jumping to solutions:** Good decision-making requires that the situation be defined and understood at the start. Only then is it prudent to develop options for resolution and select the right



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agreements. It may feel counterintuitive, but the resolver sometimes needs to slow it down and avoid hasty solutions. Your job is to fix this conflict and avert any future ones.

10. **Don't work too hard:** It is their dispute, one they have created and perpetuated. Consequently, they have the primary responsibility to maneuver their way out. While you are there to help the process along, be vigilant about working harder for a positive outcome than they are. Try to relax and relinquish as much responsibility as possible to them.

We hope these help. Let us know which topic is of interest for a dedicated article in Conflict Solutions.

