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Cool It!

Anger Management & Conflict Resolution

Carole Spiers

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ISBN 978-87-403-0229-5

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Introduction

Anger and conflict in the workplace – unless properly managed – can lead to untold damage both to the organisation and the individuals involved.

For many people, conflict is something to be avoided at all costs. As a result, they may find themselves backing away from situations where they should ideally be taking control; and may even find their own situation or former neutrality compromised as a result.

If any of this sounds familiar, or if you find yourself exposed to particular people, personalities or circumstances that make you wish you possessed the skills and tools to manage them better, then you will find everything you need in the following pages.

This practical management toolkit will increase your knowledge of everything from the theory of violence and aggression, and how to manage different types of conflict in the workplace, to the best ways of dealing with notoriously difficult personality types.

The result will be that you will be able to increase your assertiveness and self-esteem; improve the performance of your team; and develop a work environment that will be of benefit to your colleagues and yourself.

Anger, violence and aggression are the antithesis of creativity, productivity and respect. Use these tools to help to minimise the former - and maximise the latter.

Full acknowledgement is given to my colleague Gerry Jackson for his input into this toolkit.

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Anger Management - An Overview

We all get frustrated by the pressures of life but some people, it seems, are angry all the time. So how can we manage and deal with other people's anger without getting into conflict ourselves?

Anger is all around us in the form of rage. Road rage, desk rage, computer rage, air rage, trolley rage. So what do you do when you find yourself in a situation which has suddenly got out of hand?

Of course some people will do all they can to avoid conflict. As a result they may find themselves backing away from situations where they should ideally be taking control or may find that their own situation or neutrality is compromised. So what alternative strategies could they be following instead?

There are three basic ways to resolve defuse workplace anger and manage subsequent conflicts.

1. In **negotiation** the parties will discuss the issues themselves and produce a solution.
2. In **mediation** a third party helps the disputants discuss the issues and produce a solution.
3. In **arbitration**, a third party reviews each party's case and makes a decision.

We will look at actually managing Conflict in the workplace in more detail later in this programme but for the moment there is a fourth way of managing anger and interpersonal conflict, which is even more productive and helpful – **prevention**. Anger and subsequent workplace conflict can often be prevented from arising in the first place by the use of good, assertive communication.

Strategies for preventing Anger

Preventing anger requires specialist skills and an environment that will enable individuals to feel safe to explore their concerns and be assured that they are being genuinely listened to. In this respect it is not enough simply to pay attention. People need to know that the listener is paying attention *and* understanding what they are saying. This can be achieved by using the following range of communication skills effectively

- **Empathy**
- **Active listening**
- **Paraphrasing**
- **Using open questions.**
- **Summarising**
- **Using silence**
- **Focusing**
- **Reflecting**
- **Challenging/reality testing**

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The use of these skills (all of which will be covered more fully in the section entitled "**Listening Skills (or Counselling skills)"** will enable colleagues and managers to help individuals express their feelings and so reduce the chance of a conflict escalating out of control. However, the question remains: How do you deal with anger as and when it occurs?

Individual Anger Management

This can be very difficult, and your own response to someone else's anger will be affected by how anger was dealt with in your own family and upbringing. For example:

- If you were frightened as a child by angry outbursts you are likely to feel frightened when someone is angry.
- If your family sometimes shouted at each other and then forgot it and moved on, you are likely to feel reasonably comfortable with anger.
- If anger was seldom expressed in your family you are likely to feel confused and inadequate

There are some things you can and cannot do when confronted by an angry person that may help to calm things down. It does not help to try to defend yourself or your company, to get into an argument or become angry yourself. It may help to break eye contact – as two people both refusing to drop their eyes is very confrontational. It is also likely to make the situation worse if you are confrontational, invade the other person's body space or give them a verbal trigger that escalates the difficulty.

Using the skills described above allows a person to express their anger and you to acknowledge how they feel. Ask open questions to try to find out exactly what they are angry about. Tell them you are sorry they are feeling like that and, if there is something that has been done to contribute to how they are feeling, an expression of genuine regret will help. It also helps if you can agree with any part of what they are saying and acknowledge that this could be making them angry.

As Charles Handy says in *'Understanding Organisations'* (1999), "Neglected, conflict is like weeds, it can stifle productive work". But when conflict is dealt with constructively, people can be stimulated to greater creativity that can lead to a wider choice of actions and more beneficial outcomes.

5 Anger Management Tips

- Try to differentiate between current and 'regressed' anger. If you're angry with someone for more than 20 minutes, the chances are they've triggered a response to something that happened to you in the past that may not even be their fault.

- Think about the person you're angry with. Will you still be angry with them in an hour, tomorrow or next week? If not, why ruin their day – and yours?

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- Try to relax. Take some deep breaths and calm down. Maybe 'count to ten'. Get your emotions back under control and try to think rationally.

- If you're still angry, try using exercise as a release for your emotions, and to stimulate the production of endorphins that will improve your mood. If this isn't an option, find somewhere private where you can 'shout out' your anger, or call a friend who you can offload your emotions to.

- Remember: nobody 'makes' you angry– it's your choice whether that's how you respond. And you'll almost certainly feel happier with yourself if you deal with your anger positively and forgive them, rather than letting anger get the better of you.

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The Theory Of Conflict In The Workplace

Conflict may be viewed as 'the existence of competing or incompatible options', and if ignored can become highly detrimental or even destructive to a business or organisation.

However, it is almost inevitable that conflict will be found in most workplaces and it should not necessarily be regarded as negative. It dealt with well, the outcome will most likely be positive.

Negative Effects:

Reduced productivity
Lack of trust
Formation of opposed sub-groups
Lack of information
Development of secrecy
Poor morale
Massive wasting of time
Poor decision making

Potential Positive Effects of Conflict Resolution:

Improved motivation
Better problem solving
Enhanced team spirit
More realistic perceptions
Increased knowledge or skill
Improved creativity
Progression towards goals
Incentive for growth

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The emphasis is on taking **positive** action to deal with the conflict. It will not simply go away if ignored, and, although many of us do not like the prospect of confronting conflict, it is essential to do so. If someone is doing something that is causing difficulties in an organisation, their behaviour will not change unless it is brought to their attention. It is also worth bearing in mind that most of the time, even behaviour that seems negative and obstructive has some form of positive intent behind it. (For instance, the obstructive 'nit picker' is probably concerned to get the job done exactly right.)

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Conflict Categories

Internal Conflict is an emotional disturbance within an individual when there are conflicting interests, goals or values. A person may wish to do one thing and actually feel obliged to do something else. Even at fairly low levels this can result in aches and pains and a feeling of anxiety.

Interpersonal Conflict is between individuals and may be as simple as a disagreement about a workplace situation. It can also arise where basic human needs are violated – such as the need to be valued as an individual, to have some control, to have good self-esteem and to be consistent.

We often react to the violation in one of four ways:

- We retaliate or 'get back' at the other party.
- We may dominate or bully our way to a winning result.
- We may isolate ourselves and just allow the other party to have their way.
- Or - the final and preferred option – we may co-operate or assertively confront and deal with the situation.

Individuals caught up in an interpersonal conflict are often mistaken about the root cause and may even have forgotten the original issue. We need to know more about the origins. They may be based on substantive issues, decisions, ideas or actions. It may be about personalities, with emotions, motives and character involved. Or it may simply be a failure of accurate communication.

In particular environments there is also the opportunity for two other types of interpersonal conflict to develop:

Intra-Group Conflict - between individuals in a working group, team, department etc.

Inter-Group Conflict - between groups or teams. These often become very complex and may involve office politics, rumours, innuendo and gossip. Inter-group conflicts are serious for an organisation, and if unchecked, may escalate and cause serious damage.

Conflict Types

Hot Conflict involves erratic or aggressive behaviour, strong words and intense personal confrontation.

Typical characteristics of **Hot Conflict:**

- High ideals and self-esteem present
- Enthusiasm to achieve goals leads to 'point scoring'

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- Poor awareness of motives, e.g. for principles or to teach a lesson
- Hectic activity: many meetings, misinformation and plotting
- Losing of tempers
- Over-sensitivity
- Engagement:- people deliberately seeking out the other party to continue the dispute
- Information overload: rumour and gossip abound with little attempt to verify facts

Cold Conflict is much less evident to the observer and involves a cold and withdrawn atmosphere with the parties typically avoiding each other.

Typical characteristics of **Cold Conflict:**

- Cynicism and low self-esteem
- Little discussion of or engagement in the conflict
- Low energy levels: no desire to achieve goals or score points
- Lack of awareness of how the frozen hostility is adversely affecting others
- Distance between parties: no communication or contact
- Few outward signs: parties may internalise strong feelings
- Lack of sensitivity: parties seem unaffected by verbal attacks
- Avoidance: won't go to the same meeting or ignore each other if they do meet
- Information starvation: few rumours and lack of information

Stages of Conflict

Conflicts go though a series of stages, each stage more serious and more difficult to resolve than the one before it.

Stage 1

Everyday concerns and disputes: the issue is the issue, not the personalities, and communication is still working. Normal coping strategies such as toleration, assertive communication, compromise etc. may well work here. However, those involved may remember what has happened and become more cautious and less trusting in their dealings with others. The more of these events there are, the more likely it is that they will escalate.

Stage 2

More significant, persistent and major disputes where the consequences are longer term and the emotional involvement is at a higher level: collaboration disappears and each party is seeking an advantage over the other. People start to generalise, exaggerate and keep 'score'. The actual issue becomes submerged under fixed negative views of each other and the important thing is to win the fight. The parties are unlikely to resolve things without outside intervention.

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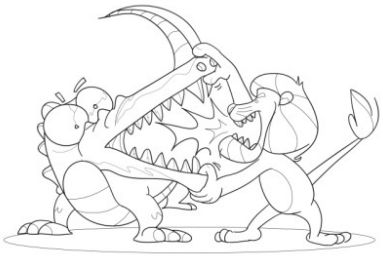


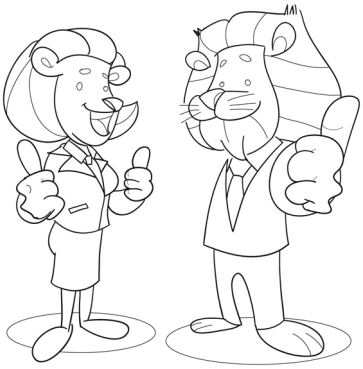
Managing Stage 2 conflict means you have to manage the people issues first. It is important to create a safe atmosphere so that you can spend time allowing each party to say as much as they want. Any generalisations should be clarified and possible exaggerations checked out. Feelings should be acknowledged before moving away from the personalities back to the issues. It needs to be stressed that it is the responsibility of the parties themselves to find a solution. It is important now to look for points of agreement and take time to move the parties towards the middle ground without forcing issues or concessions.

Stage 3

Serious, pathological, harmful battles: the desire to win is replaced by the desire to hurt or punish. Language and behaviour become quite extreme in the desire to destroy the other. The parties become de-personalised in the eyes of each other so it is OK to do whatever they need to destroy the other. Individuals may even damage themselves in order to engineer the downfall of the other.

Logic and reason are not effective by the time things have reached Stage 3 and you may need to prepare to minimise losses. A neutral intervention team will be necessary here whose role may be negotiation, mediation or arbitration. Once a decision is made, those remaining will need help in refocusing and the losers will have to be dealt with, possibly by replacement or at least a cooling off period. The most important thing is to prevent a Stage 2 conflict escalating to Stage 3 in the first place.

An awareness of the type of conflict and the stage it has reached can therefore be helpful in deciding the most appropriate way of managing it.



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The Theory of Violence and Aggression

A Violent or Aggressive incident is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as: "Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his/her employment."

Violence and aggression in the workplace is often a powerful cause of undue stress in individuals and groups, and a policy should exist in organisations to minimise it and to deal with it - should it occur.

In any incident, there is always one person who is aggressive and another who is a potential victim. There then follows some interaction between the two, after which, as a result of the interaction, there is an in outcome. The quality of the outcome depends on how the interaction takes place and often on how the potential victim manages the interaction.

When aggression is directed at us we have an age-old choice between two options - 'fight or flight'. But there is also a third option - we can choose to try to control or manage the interaction. If that doesn't work we can still return to the 'flight' option, though in the vast majority of situations, managing the interaction well will defuse the aggression and result in a non-violent outcome.

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The 'fight or flight' reaction to a situation was developed during the evolution of the human race (and the animal kingdom) as a way of making us react very quickly to danger, so tending to keep us safe. This primitive reaction causes adrenaline and other chemicals to instantly enter the bloodstream and prepare us to fight or to run. However, we learn throughout our lives that some situations we thought were dangerous are not so and the rapid reaction is not necessary. This ability to assess what is happening can allow us to override the 'fight or flight' reaction and choose different alternatives. So we might perhaps reason with someone, remain in the situation to help others or remain in the situation so as not to lose face.

Perceptions of events and people also affect how we deal with events in our lives. We look at what we see and make judgements based on such things as the situation, people's body language, tone of voice and how someone is dressed. The judgement is also affected by what we have learned during our lives. Issues such as how tolerant we are, our way of stereotyping others, how we perceive someone's intentions, cultural and racial differences, and even whether we bear a grudge, can all make a difference to how we end up feeling during the interaction. Emotions such as fear, distress, annoyance, sense of failure or injured pride will then affect how we react in any situation.

Generally, people become aggressive or violent because they are unable to get something they want, or some wish or desire is blocked. That causes frustration which leads to aggressive feelings. There is then some form of trigger which tips the aggressive feelings over into actual aggression in the form of threats, abuse or violence. The movement from a blocked desire to frustration is likely to be made worse by mental illness, excess alcohol or if the person is in pain.

Aggression may take the form of:

- Shouting and swearing
- Abuse, including sexual and racial
- Threats
- Menacing looks
- Threatening or abusive gestures

Violence may take the form of:

- Pushing
- Poking
- Punching
- Slapping
- Head-butting
- Kicking
- Violence towards objects
- Use of weapons, knife, blunt instrument, gun etc.

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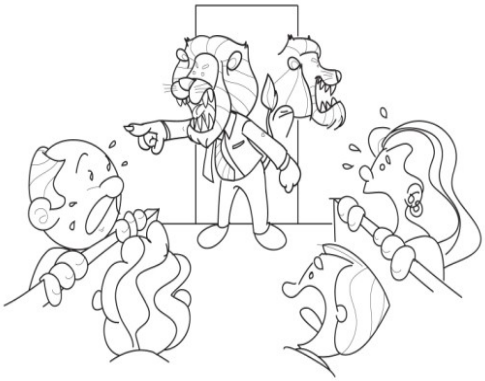

The Biology of Aggression

When the body receives a signal of threat or danger, the adrenal gland is activated which releases adrenaline and other chemicals into the bloodstream. This cause a series of biological results:

- The liver releases glucose as a supply of energy
- Breathing speeds up to provide more oxygen
- The heart rate speeds up to supply more blood to the muscles
- Digestion stops as blood is diverted to the muscles
- There may be a churning feeling in the stomach and dry mouth
- The skin may change colour, become redder or paler
- Muscles become tense and ready for action
- The pupils of the eye dilate and focus on something directly in front of them

All human beings have a sense of personal space around them and when this is violated they are much more likely to become aggressive. Conversely, if someone invades your space, it is a good indication that they are becoming aggressive and you need to back off.

Everyone's personal space is different. Some require more than others, and differences such as culture, gender, upbringing and age all determine how much space each of us needs. We need something like 3-4 feet in front of us, 5 feet to the rear and much less at the sides - about 1½ feet. The amount of space needed also varies depending on the person who is getting closer to us.

There is a good reason for the necessity for this gap. If someone who is within 4 feet of us decides to attack, our reaction time will not be fast enough to stop it. So again, you are much more vulnerable if someone is that close to you and you need to back off.

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Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs and Signals

When you are involved in an interaction with another person where there may be some form of conflict, it is important to be observant and vigilant. There are signs and signals which can give you a good indication that the person is starting to feel aggressive, and the situation could deteriorate to the point where you become the subject of aggressive or violent behaviour.

Bear in mind that there are wide differences in what is normal and acceptable behaviour amongst different ethnic and cultural groups.

The types of changes to look for include:

Verbal Signals

- Change in voice tone, e.g. becoming emotional, sounding angry etc.
- Ritually repeating one point
- Sudden change of direction in the conversation
- Dehumanising language, e.g. "You're all the same" or "Slut"... "Bastards". Making you an object or part of a group couched in insulting terms
- Repetition of the facts
- Threats

Non-Verbal Signals

- Physical closeness, invading your space
- Positioning, directly face on or blocking your exit
- Movement, constantly moving about, unable to sit still
- Touching, perhaps a prod with a finger
- Facial expression, tight mouth, teeth clenched, frowning, nostrils flaring etc.
- Eye movements, staring, no eye contact, darting around, glazed or empty
- Gestures, pointing, 'V' signs, one finger signs etc.
- Head shaking
- Appearance can highlight a lack of care about themselves which may extend to not caring about others
- Mirroring – be careful that you do not mirror the aggressive signals of the other person

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Strategies For Managing Conflict And Reducing Aggression

It is usually said that there are three basic ways of resolving conflicts:

Negotiation, where the parties discuss the issues themselves and produce a solution.

Mediation, where a third party helps the disputants discuss the issues and produces a solution. (Here the decisions are still with the parties.)

Arbitration, where a third party reviews each party's case and makes a decision. In this case the parties do not make the decision but are more or less bound by the decision of the third party

But there is a fourth way, which is much more productive and helpful – **prevention**. Conflict can often be prevented from arising in the first place by the use of good assertive communication.

Styles Of Conflict Management

Obliging, where one party allows the other to have their own way without regard for their own views or needs.

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Avoiding, where an individual withdraws, sidesteps or passes the buck – in fact anything rather than deal with the issue.

Compromising, where both parties get part of what they want but give up other parts. This is where negotiating will be used.

Collaborating, which is the desirable, win/win management style. Here information is exchanged, differences examined and a solution acceptable to all is produced. Creative problem solving methods are likely to be used with all parties committed to working out the issues.

There are also a variety of skills that can be utilised when dealing with those in the workplace who are involved in conflict or in a situation that is escalating into aggression or violence. Good listening skills are a very important component of this style, and the techniques mentioned below may be used at all stages.

Listening Skills (or Counselling Skills)

People need to feel safe to explore their concerns and be assured that they are being genuinely listened to. It is not enough to simply be paying attention, they need to know that the listener is paying attention and understanding what they are saying. This is achieved by using 'Active Listening', 'Empathy' and the other skills appropriately.

Empathy

This is a way of understanding what someone tells you by entering their world, seeing things as they see them and communicating your understanding to them so they can see that you understand (or are at least doing your best to do so). This does not include saying, "I understand exactly how you feel." The skills of Active Listening and Paraphrasing, in particular, can help to show empathy. Also, an acknowledgement of the person's present emotions, e.g. "I can see that has made you angry" or "I can see how upset you are" or "This is very difficult for you to accept."

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Active Listening

This consists of allowing the person to see signs that the listener is paying proper attention to them. Good eye contact should be maintained, the listener should nod and use frequent minimal prompts ("hmm, yes, I see," etc.). Body posture should be relaxed and open - perhaps slightly leaning forward and looking alert. Facial expressions should be appropriate and matching the person's mood.

Paraphrasing

This involves putting what someone has said briefly in your own words and saying it back to them. It enables you to check your understanding of what they have said and for them to correct you if necessary, but it also allows them to actually hear that you have understood what they are saying. A paraphrase is a very powerful tool in establishing an empathetic relationship. Paraphrases very often begin with the word "so ....". You do not need to paraphrase everything a person says but an occasional paraphrase, particularly of something important, is very helpful.

Using Open Questions

An open question is one that cannot be answered by a "Yes" or "No". A closed question is one which can be answered with a "Yes", "No" or other one word answer. Open questions usually begin with the words: 'how', 'what', 'where' or 'who'. Try to avoid 'why', as it is inclined to make people feel defensive. There are occasions when a closed question is appropriate but generally open questions have the effect of helping people to move on and explore their concerns in more detail.

Summarising

This means giving a person or group a short summary of what they have said. A summary is longer than a paraphrase and is often used at the end of a session to sum up and pick out themes or particular concerns. It can be used to check that the listener has understood a lot of facts, especially if someone is confused or is confusing the listener. The use of a summary can help the person and the listener to put facts in the right order, reduce confusion and focus on the more important parts of what has been said.

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Using Silence

This is not an easy skill, as many of us feel silence is awkward and have to say something to fill it. Silence can often be used to allow an individual or group to reflect for a moment on what they have just said or what they are going to say next and so move the interview on in the direction they wish. Filling the silence with a question can divert them into the listener's direction. People often have unfocused eyes, perhaps looking downwards when they are marshalling their thoughts.

Focusing

Individuals may need to be helped to pick out a major concern from a number of concerns so that this can form the focus of the session. Otherwise the session can end up flitting about from subject to subject, possibly avoiding the most important part of the discussion.

Reflecting

This involves picking out a single word or phrase and using exactly the same word or words back to the person with a slight questioning inflection in the voice. The word or phrase reflected should be one with an emotional 'load' behind it, and reflecting this back to them will often have the effect of causing them to explore what is behind it, thus moving the interview on.

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Challenging / RealityTesting

This is helping someone to see a discrepancy between their perception of what is happening and reality. Sometimes people have a faulty perception of things they did or how others perceive them, and they can be helped to examine the reality by careful questioning. You may ask them, for example, what evidence there is to support their negative view. The aim is to help them see things from a different perspective. Often a challenge will help a person to see an unused resource that they have (a 'challenge to strengths'). Or, you may point out a discrepancy between what they are saying and their body language (they may be telling you an awful story and smiling!).

Other challenging questions could include:

- I am not sure how that is relevant. Could you explain how it is?
- You say (xxxxxx) several times. Could you give examples? When and where? How often?
- When you say "all the time" what do you mean?
- How is that related to the conflict?

Dealing with Anger

This can be very difficult and your own response to someone else's anger will be affected by how anger was dealt with in your own family and upbringing.

For example, if you were frightened as a child by angry outbursts you are likely to feel frightened when someone is angry. If your family sometimes shouted at each other and then forgot it and moved on, you are likely to feel reasonably comfortable with anger. If anger was seldom expressed in your family you are likely to feel confused and inadequate.

There are some things you can and cannot do when confronted by an angry person that may help to calm things down. It does not help to try to defend yourself or the company, to get into an argument or become angry yourself. It may help to break eye contact. Two people both refusing to drop their eyes is very confrontational. It is also likely to make the situation worse if you are confrontational, invade the other person's body space or give them a verbal trigger that escalates the difficulty.

Use the skills described above in allowing the person to express their anger and acknowledging how they feel. Ask open questions to try to find out exactly what it is they are angry about. Tell them you are sorry that they are feeling like that and, if there is something that has been done to contribute to how they are feeling, an expression of genuine regret will help. It also helps if you can agree with any part of what they are saying and acknowledge that this is how things seem to be at the moment.

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Verbal And Non-Verbal Behaviour

Before discussing methods for reducing the likelihood of becoming the subject of violence or aggression, it is worth mentioning some behaviour that may make things worse:

- Maintaining unbroken eye contact
- Touching, poking perhaps
- Being patronising or talking down to someone
- Giving ultimatums
- Inviting them to be aggressive, "Go on then!"
- Behaving like a victim
- Being aggressive or shouting yourself
- Insisting on a sense of pride or duty
- Allowing access to something that could be used as a weapon, including jewellery, clothing or other articles.

In any interaction with another, there are three types of behaviour used - **submissive, aggressive or assertive** - the characteristics of which are listed below.

Submissive

- Acting in an apologetic or frightened manner
- Not standing up for your rights
- Not expressing your views
- Using a soft or unsteady voice
- Not saying what you mean
- Avoiding eye contact
- Using cringing body language
- Using 'umm' and 'er' too much in conversation

Aggressive

- Putting others down
- Using sarcasm
- Invading the other's space
- Bulldozing others into doing or saying what you want
- Interrupting rudely
- Being threatening or abusing
- Using 'you should' and 'you ought' in conversation

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Assertive

- Looking assured, caring and understanding
- Using good listening skills
- Keeping direct, but not constant, eye contact
- Using a firm and relaxed voice
- Standing upright and balanced
- Using empathetic phrases
- Not being judgmental
- Using co-operative phrases
- Using 'I' statements

Assertive Communication

- Be clear, about what you want, what you want to say, your purpose, i.e. to prevent escalation
- Be direct, don't pussyfoot around, ask for the behaviour to stop
- Be precise, use short clear sentences
- Be specific, address the aggression before other issues
- Be positive, in word and action, if you don't know – find out
- Be confident, in your skills, in your ability to communicate

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Clearly, while it is being suggested that you behave and communicate in an assertive way, if this is not your usual habit, you may not find it easy to do, especially in a frightening situation. If this is the case, it is suggested that you practice behaving assertively in your daily life, with people that you know well, and in situations that are not too difficult or threatening. Once you have become proficient at behaving this way, it will be easier when you are faced with aggression. You may also wish to consider attending an assertiveness course, which is often provided at local colleges.

Advantages of Being Assertive

- Improves relationships at work
- Gives you greater self confidence
- Gives you greater confidence in others
- Helps you increase your own self control
- Saves you time and energy
- Leads to win/win situations

It is important to minimise feelings of frustration being experienced by someone you are interacting with at your work. Remember that frustration is likely to be caused by them not getting something they want, and although they may still not be able to have whatever it is, using the tactics below will help.

Minimising Frustration

- Explain clearly and check that they understand
- Don't make false promises, they will appreciate honesty
- Know your job and your limits
- Listen well
- Give realistic options
- Don't patronise
- Don't keep them waiting
- Try to prevent an audience
- Give them information. If you can't, explain why and when you will be able to.

There are also many ways in which you can actively indicate to someone else that you are not aggressive or intending to be, and this is likely to have the effect of reducing their own aggression and feelings of aggression.

Non-Aggressive Behaviour

- Breathing deeply and slowly
- Maintaining a relaxed posture and relaxed muscles
- Using open hand language
- Perhaps sitting down, unless violence is imminent
- If standing, stand at an angle of 45 degrees, this is safer and less confrontational

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- Listen actively
- Keep your voice low and calm
- Show interest and concern
- Empathise
- Keep appropriate eye contact
- Ask if they mind you making notes

When the situation starts to become somewhat fraught and the person is looking as if they are starting to feel aggressive or they start to behave in an aggressive way, the list below summarises specific techniques which can be used to defuse the situation. Most of them have been mentioned above under previous headings but they bear repeating because of their importance as ways of stopping the situation becoming grave. (You may not feel comfortable with all of them, but select those that you feel you could work with.)

Defusing Techniques

- Diverting: refocus attention on a different subject or on note taking
- Distracting: "What was that?" "That's the police" etc. Needs to be convincing
- Appearing calm and efficient
- Controlling your own emotions
- Showing non-aggressive behaviour
- Actively listening, paraphrasing and empathising
- Trying to identify what the frustrated wish is and solving it if you can
- Pointing out possible problems for them
- Giving them information
- Asking them to stop
- Perhaps sitting down
- Maybe consider humour, but be careful, not against the person. Perhaps a warm smile and cajoling words might help, particularly if you know the person
- If all else fails, get out, walk quickly or run if you have to!

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Basic Negotiation Skills

Negotiation is an attempt by two people (or groups) who are currently in disagreement, to reach a mutually acceptable solution to the difficulty.

Negotiation should result in a win/win solution, so that both parties are happy with the result. In order to achieve this, each party needs to know clearly what the other wants and each party has to be prepared to change or compromise until both feel that the position is acceptable.

The basic skills required for successful negotiation are to be able to:

- Define objectives and be flexible about them
- Explore a wide range of options
- Prepare well
- Listen well
- Obtain information from others
- Assertively communicate their own information

Negotiation is used in a wide range of situations, but we shall limit this discussion to one-to-one negotiation in the workplace. When planning a negotiation it may be worth considering the use of an agenda so the points for discussion are set out in the order in which you wish to deal with them.

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There are five stages that need to be completed to reach the end of a negotiation:

- Preparation
- Initial positions
- Discussion
- Compromising or flexibility
- Making the deal

Preparation

In many situations it is important to know as much as you can about your own position and the position of the other party, so some prior research is often appropriate.

Possible research areas:

- What, exactly, is your own position?
- What, as close as you can get, is the other person's position?
- What might you settle for?
- What is the other person likely to want?
- Which aspects could be changed and which could not?
- How might a variety of different solutions affect other people or the business itself?
- Is the interaction between different personalities playing a part in the conflict?
- What, if anything, has been tried before?

Initial Positions

Each party should start by clearly and assertively stating how they currently see things. There should be no judgement and no personal attacks. Each party should listen carefully to the other without interruptions. Your initial position should be reasonable and not too extreme.

Discussion

This should proceed in a reasonably amicable manner with each party listening well to the other and then communicating their own points. Each agreeing with what they can of the other's points will start to produce an atmosphere where cooperation is more likely.

Compromise and Flexibility

As the discussion proceeds, each party may wish to suggest changes to the initial positions, either to their own initial position or to the initial position of the other party. The discussion continues in this way, with the parties trying to maintain an element of flexibility until they can reach an agreement that is acceptable to both.

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It is sometimes helpful for parties to make tentative suggestions to the other to try to move things forward. "If I were to do …, would you be prepared to do…?"

Parties may need to take a longer term view and not regard the interchange as a competition where they have to win to the detriment of the other party.

Making the Deal

When agreement has been reached it is most helpful to make a written record of it, including how the implementation of the agreement will be monitored. Both parties should agree the content of the written record and sign it.

Body Language

Do be aware of your own body language: lean slightly forward and maintain good eye contact so you are looking interested. Smiling appropriately can break down barriers and produce good rapport between two people. Observe the body language of the other party - you can often pick up when they are losing interest, strongly opposed to what you are saying or starting to agree.

Breakdown

Sometimes negotiations break down and the parties concerned are unable to reach an agreement. This may be for a variety of reasons, but in any event some further strategy then needs to be introduced because the conflict cannot be allowed to continue unresolved. Often this is a time at which to introduce a third party mediator (see below). It may also be possible to ask a more senior manager to make a decision binding on both parties (arbitration) – although the two parties in the dispute then have no control over the outcome.

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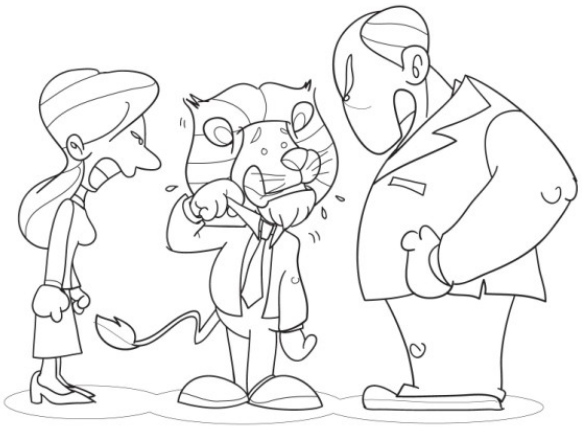
Mediation

Mediation is the process where a third party assists the disputants to examine all sides of the dispute, to express what they need to say, establish common ground and move towards a solution that is arrived at by the parties and acceptable to both. The process is dealt with more fully below. The mediator's role is to collect information from both parties, set ground rules for the process, facilitate a joint discussion whilst enforcing the ground rules, encourage creative problem solving by the parties, and ensure the eventual solution is adhered to as they move forward. It is important to emphasise that the process is not about seeking to apportion blame but to find an acceptable solution.

The choice of mediator (or mediators if more than one is being used) is important. There are a number of qualities they should have.



Mediator Qualities

- Seen by both parties as independent, impartial and trustworthy
- Seen by both parties as credible and competent
- Appointed from outside the direct team of both parties
- Specially trained and skilled
- A good facilitator and communicator
- Able to generate creative ideas
- Able to manage group discussions and people's emotions
- Able to maintain a balance and not be judgemental

The Use Of A Mediator Should Be Considered When:

- The parties wish to have some control over the solution
- Communication between the parties is not working
- The parties do not have the skill to communicate well

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- The parties are lacking in trust in one another
- They cannot find a solution themselves
- The parties fear a loss if they negotiate
- A delay in resolution may be damaging
- Relationships are important
- Both sides have a good case
- There is a need to express strong feelings

There may be circumstances under which mediation should be preceded or accompanied by additional training, counselling or disciplinary action.

Mediation Should Not Be Used When:

- One side or both is unwilling to consider a resolution
- One side wants the other to be punished
- A legal decision in court is required

It may be possible to explore these situations using mediation, but if the view persists, mediation should be stopped.

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Individual Issues That Cannot Be Mediated:

Sometimes, during a mediation session, issues arise that cannot be dealt with there and then, for example:

- When the issue is about something that cannot be changed
- The issue is about someone not in the room
- Those present do not have the authority to make changes

Typical Work Situations Where Mediation Is Particularly Helpful Include:

- Disputes between colleagues that are preventing them working together
- Inter-departmental quarrels
- 'Personality clashes' or poor working relationships
- Communication breakdowns
- Deadlocks in planning
- Changes of working roles
- Conflicts over task allocation
- Conflicts over aims and objectives
- Where there is a long history of bad feeling
- Many other situations

Careful consideration should be given to selecting the venue for mediation. The room should be neutral, not belonging to either party, and interruptions should be prevented - either from other people or telephones (including mobile phones).

The furniture should be set out in a way that encourages communication between the parties and the mediator, but also enables communication between the parties. It is not helpful to have the parties on opposite sides of a table. Whether or not tables are used at all may depend on normal practice in the organisation. Some people may feel uncomfortable with chairs set out without desks or some form of table.

The Three Stage Model Of Mediation

1. Exploration
2. Understanding leading to new scenario
3. Action

Stage 1 – Exploration

It is important for the mediator to be in possession of all the facts, and each party should be able to tell the mediator where to obtain the information needed, which should include:

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- The history of the conflict
- Communication patterns
- The distribution of perceived power
- How important the problem is
- Any interpersonal difficulties involved
- What emotions have been aroused

This information may be collected at separate interviews with each party or at a joint session with all parties present. If it is a 'hot' conflict with a lot of feelings around it may be better to keep the parties separate at this stage. While it is preferable to obtain the information by interviews, the use of written statements or questionnaires could be considered.

Another advantage of separate interviews is that the mediator has an opportunity to build a rapport with each party and for them to develop trust in the mediator.

Before any session takes place, all parties should know how it will be run - i.e. adhering to strict rules as to how people should communicate. Apart from the obvious need to control and prevent any further escalation, this also models a way of dealing with others that will be a useful learning for them in the future.

Ground rules:

- Speak in personal terms using "I" statements
- Personal attacks and abuse will not be allowed
- Each party will be allowed an uninterrupted hearing
- Each party should listen to and try to see the issues from the perspective of the other party
- Verifiable facts are preferable to assumptions
- Confidentiality is not helpful as it leads to secrets

Stage 2 – Understanding Leading to a New Scenario

This part of the process is always carried out with all parties together. It may continue immediately from Stage 1 if that was a joint session, or may be a separate meeting set up later. The objective is for both parties to be able state their case in the presence of the other party and eventually agree. They should be allowed to express how they feel and to 'let off steam'.

The mediator helps them to clarify what the issues are and to separate personality problems from practical issues. They will be helped to discover any common ground between them and to look for new perspectives.

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Towards the end of this part they will be encouraged to say how they want things to be different and to come up with a joint preferred new scenario. This part is where the skill of the mediator to control what is happening and enforce the ground rules is important.

Stage 3 – Action

In this stage the creativity of the parties and the mediator come to the fore. The parties are encouraged to brainstorm as many strategies as possible for achieving the new scenario, and the mediator may choose to add suggestions of their own or build on suggestions of the parties. The results of the brainstorm should be recorded, for which a flip chart is an ideal medium.

Next they will evaluate each of the options and select which strategy will be used to implement the new scenario and then plan appropriate action. The mediator should ensure that the eventual goal is 'SMART'. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely.)

Decisions should be taken as to how the implementation will be monitored and evaluated as it goes forward. It will probably help if there is a third party appointed to help with the monitoring.

The mediator can help if that is appropriate in the circumstances. It is important that the process of implementation is carefully monitored so that the parties do not slip back into the old conflict.

Further meetings may be arranged if necessary, and they should be encouraged to use the communication skills they learned during the mediation process.

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Individual Skills For Conflict Management

There are a series of specific personal skills that are useful in managing conflict in the workplace (and elsewhere). Some of these are useful in particular situations; others are more general in their application. These skills are now dealt with below.

Assertiveness

Well exercised assertiveness skills not only help us to be more positive and direct in asking for our needs to be met, they can also play an invaluable role in protecting our self-worth and confidence. When we are being assertive, we feel, and look, cool, calm and collected. Even if we do not get what we want, we emerge from situations with our self respect intact, knowing that we have behaved honourably and with dignity. If we happen to be disappointed with the outcome, we do not come away kicking ourselves for being a 'wimp' or 'bully', we admire ourselves for having the courage to try and the dignity to remain in control. Furthermore, people who are witness to our assertive behaviour are usually similarly impressed and much more likely to treat us with respect and consideration.

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Assertive Behaviour

Assertiveness is trying to get your own needs met, whilst having consideration for the needs of others. Assertive people use the following behaviours and ways of communicating:

- Looking assured, caring and understanding
- Using good listening skills
- Keeping direct, but not constant, eye contact
- Using a firm and relaxed voice
- Standing upright and balanced
- Using empathetic phrases
- Not being judgmental
- Using co-operative phrases
- Using 'I' statements

Assertive Communication

- Be clear, about what you want, what you want to say and your purpose, i.e. to prevent escalation
- Be direct, don't pussyfoot around.
- Be precise, use short, clear sentences
- Be specific, address the aggression before other issues
- Be positive, in word and action. If you don't know – find out
- Be confident, in your skills, in your ability to communicate

Assertiveness is not easy if you are not used to it, and many of us need to practice the skills in a non-threatening situation before trying them out in 'real life'. It is also very helpful, when you anticipate a situation when you will need to be assertive, to plan exactly what you are going to say. Perhaps write down the form of words you are going to use, or at least mentally rehearse what you will say. (See 'Scripting' below.)

Before trying your new skills make sure you are calm and your body language is assertive.

There Are a Few Specific Techniques That Can Be Used In Particular Situations.

1. Broken Record
2. Fogging
3. Negative Assertion
4. Negative Enquiry
5. Scripting

Broken Record

This may be used when:

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- You wish to preserve your time or energy and do not want to be sidetracked into argument
- You want to refuse to do something that is unfairly being asked of you
- You want to delay dealing with a problem because it is not your current priority
- You need to emphasise an important point and are not being listened to attentively
- Something requires urgent attention or immediate action and you cannot afford to be 'fobbed off'.

You state directly and concisely either:

- What you want or need or feel
- What you are prepared to do, or not to do
- What you would like the other person to do, or stop doing

Continually repeat a one-sentence summary of this message over and over again until the person concerned either 'gives in' or you both agree on a reasonable compromise. You also need to add an empathetic statement from time to time to show you understand their position and reduce the negative impact of your repeated message. Do not respond to any remarks designed to make you feel guilty, or to personal attacks or threats. Just repeating your message makes argument impossible.

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Example

Could you stay on and get this job done tonight?

Mary:	I'm sorry, I can't work overtime tonight, I'm doing something important.
Bill:	Well, it has to get done and you usually do these things.
Mary:	I appreciate that it's going to be difficult but I can't work overtime tonight.
Bill:	It wouldn't take you all that long.
Mary:	I can't work overtime tonight, I have an important commitment.
Bill:	But I can't do it and I did do you a favour last week.
Mary:	I can see it is difficult for you, but I can't work overtime tonight.
Bill:	I suppose it will have to wait then.

Bill: **Example**

Beryl: I'd prefer it if you called me Beryl not 'love'.

Colin: What's up with you - got out of the wrong side of the bed?

Beryl: I just said I'd like you to call me Beryl.

Colin: It's just being friendly - I'm not trying to be rude or anything, it's just the way I talk.

Beryl: I appreciate that it's your usual way of talking to people, but I'd like you to call me Beryl.

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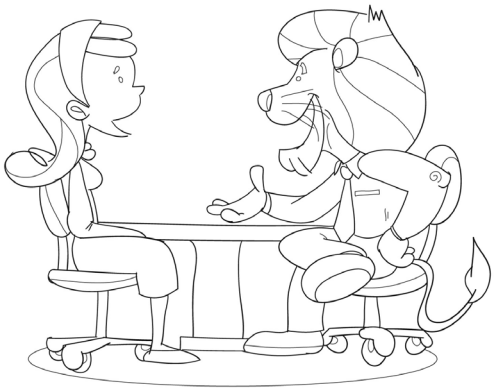
Colin: Oh, OK, have it your way. Beryl, would you mind...?



Fogging

This may be used whenever you are being criticised:

- By someone whom you consider has no right to criticise you
- At an inconvenient time or in an inappropriate setting (and where you may want to postpone dealing with the criticism)
- Before you have had time to calm down and think through an assertive reply
- By someone whose good opinion isn't needed by you and you want to preserve your energy and time
- Your critic is loading you with insults and put-downs which are so 'irrational' that it is pointless for you to engage in serious debate
- By someone who is angry and you want to wait until he or she is calmer before tackling the criticism
- You feel yourself getting tearful or angry and want to postpone discussion until you feel more in control of your feelings

You respond to unwanted criticism by using a reply that implies that there may be a probability that the critic could be right, even though inwardly you may know or think he or she is completely wrong. The critic is usually taken aback because he or she does not get the response intended and is not sure what is going on (hence the name 'fogging').

You continue to 'fog' each additional criticism until the critic gives up when he or she realises that there is no satisfaction to be had in attacking this victim!

N.B. At first glance this technique may look more like a people-pleasing habit rather than a self esteem boosting skill, but it is an appropriate self-defence mechanism and an invaluable boost to your personal power.

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Example

John: You stupid idiot - what the hell did you do that for? You can't be trusted with anything. You're a...
Mike: Perhaps it wasn't the best thing to do.
John: If I were in charge here, I'd have you sacked immediately! People like you just cause trouble - wherever you are there's chaos.
Mike: Maybe I'm not the easiest person to work with.
John: I don't know why that idiot thinks people with a load of paper qualifications are fit to run a warehouse.
Mike: You could be right; perhaps I haven't enough practical experience.
John: Well, let's forget it this time but I hope you'll think before you act next time.
Mike: I will.

Negative Assertion

This may be used when:

- You are being criticised for a fault or mistake that you have already taken on board and are working on to correct
- You are hearing the same old story and do not want to have to waste energy justifying yourself again and again
- Your critic has chosen an inopportune or insensitive time to remind you of your faults or mistakes
- You are too busy or tired to deal with your critic and would prefer to discuss the matter later
- Your critic (however right) is not the kind of person with whom you want to explore your weaknesses.

You respond to the critic by calmly agreeing with the truth, or element of truth, in what he or she is saying, without adding a defensive justification which could fuel an argument. You use the strategy until the other person gives up the 'attack'.

In the following examples note how using this technique helps to keep the scenes from escalating into unwanted arguments.

Example A

Mother: You're always too busy. You never seem to have time to talk to me when I ring.
Jill: Yes it's true; I don't often have time to talk to you when you ring these days.
Mother: You ought to take better care of yourself - you work too many evenings.

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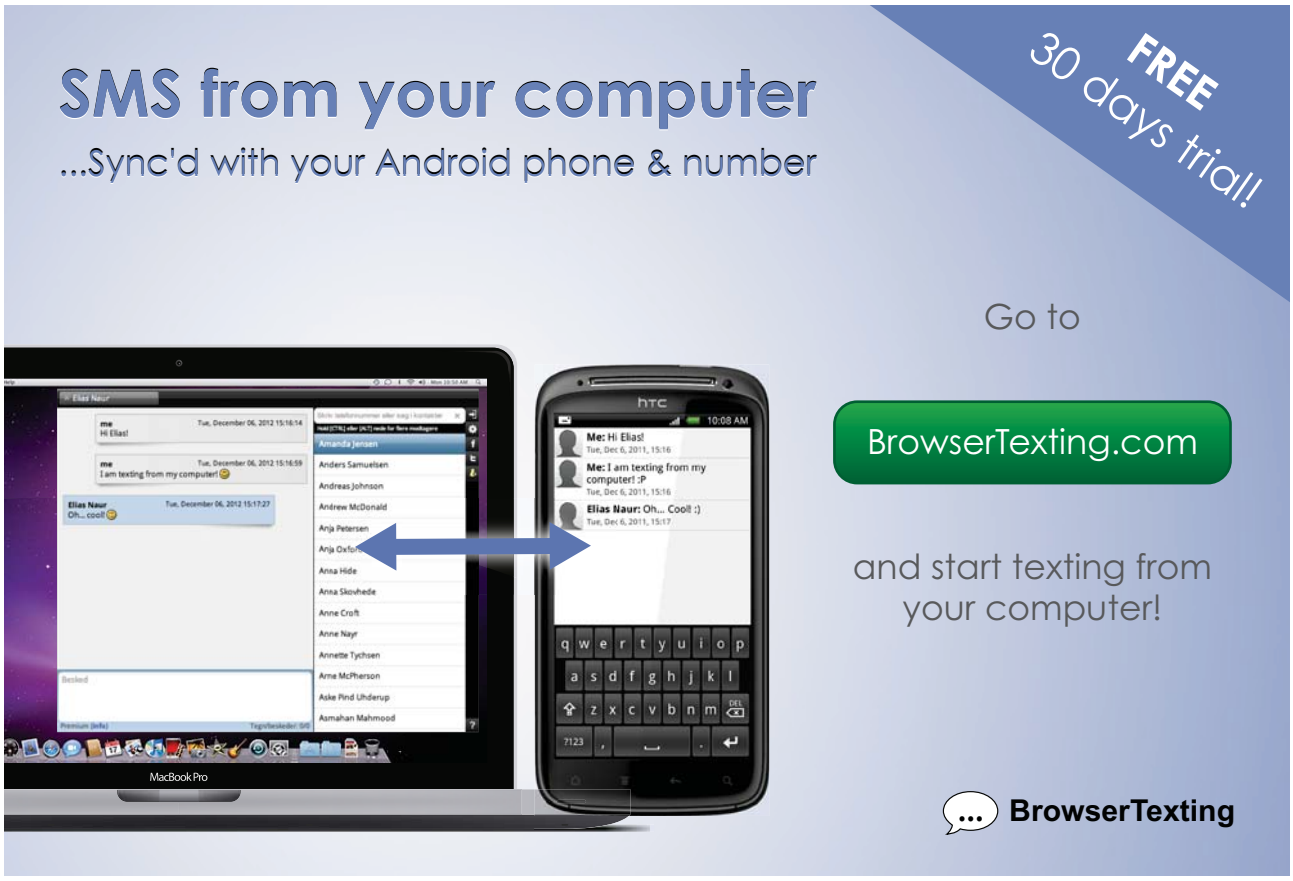
Jill: Yes, you're right; I am working too many evenings at the moment.
Mother: The children must get fed up as well - they can't be seeing enough of you.
Jill: I know they are not seeing enough of me at the moment.
Mother: Well I hope things will be different next week. I'll ring you again then.
Jill: Thanks - I'll look forward to a long chat then.

Example B

Simon: You're late again.
Jackie: Yes, I'm late.
Simon: It's getting to be a really bad habit.
Jackie: It is a bad habit.
Simon: You're full of bad habits you are.
Jackie: Yes. I'm certainly not perfect.
Simon: You ought to sort yourself out - you'll never get on in this place if you don't.
Jackie: It's true; I do need to change in several ways.
Simon: Women are all the same - they never take their work seriously enough. Home is where their heart is, they'll never change.
Jackie: I do put a high value on my personal life.
Simon: Well I suppose it's your life - if you want it that way. But don't moan about not having enough money.



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Jackie: No I won't.

Negative Enquiry

You can use this strategy when:

- You are puzzled by a remark or 'look' and think that it may indicate an unwarranted, unfair or ill-timed criticism.
- You are not sure whether the critic is well-intentioned and is simply asking for information/ trying to give you helpful feedback or is in fact trying to 'bait' you (because perhaps you're seen as an easy target, or because your critic is simply bored).
- You think someone might be 'backbiting' or gossiping about you, and you want to expose and stop the source.

You respond to the critic's verbal or non-verbal indication of disapproval by asking for clarification or directly inviting criticism. If the critic should then launch into unwanted criticism you can stop his or her flow by using Fogging or Negative Assertion as above. If the criticism is valid and useful, you can (if you have the time and energy) continue to use the strategy to gain more specific information.

Warning! Be careful only to use Negative Enquiry when your self esteem feels relatively resilient and you feel confident enough to use either Fogging or Negative Assertion to block further criticism.

Example

Sheila: When I came in the room, the conversation went dead. Were you talking about me? As this has happened several times this week I was wondering whether I am doing anything you don't like or may disapprove of?

Robert: Well, yes, we do think you've become a bit bossy lately.

Sheila: In what ways? Can you give me an example?

Robert: It's just your attitude.

Sheila: Do you think that I don't care about your feelings?

Robert: No, it isn't that. It's just that since you've been promoted you're no fun any more.

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Sheila: Perhaps I am a bit serious, but in future if you want to make comments about my style of management I would prefer you to do so to my face, and not choose a time when we are trying to prepare for an important meeting.

Scripting

You can use this strategy when you want to make almost any request or a justified complaint, but it is particularly useful when:

- You know that you are likely to be more passive or aggressive than you would like to be
- Your feelings of anxiety or frustration may need to be kept under good control
- You know you will be speaking to someone who may not give you the attention you deserve because he or she is busy or very preoccupied
- The person you will be talking to is intimidating or might pre-judge you as 'wimpish' or your needs as unimportant
- You want to follow up a criticism which you had previously blocked with Fogging or Negative Assertion
- You want to set a positive, upbeat tone to a negotiation process (especially useful when the other party is highly defensive or pessimistic).

Although Scripting is most commonly used to prepare for verbal encounters, it can also be used as an invaluable guide for composing punchy, concise letters or short reports or requisitions.

You use a set structure and strict guidelines to help you prepare a concise assertive opening 'speech' and then thoroughly rehearse it (in your head, out loud or in role play). Your prepared script helps you to sound so authoritative and confident that you are usually listened to with attention and respect; and your chances of getting what you want or need are therefore greatly increased.

How to Prepare a Script

Explanation

- Explain the situation objectively and concisely, using only one sentence whenever possible.
- Do not include justifications or theories about the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of the situation.

Feelings

- Share your own feelings accurately, using an assertive 'I feel...' statement rather than an accusatory 'You (or it) make(s) me feel...'
- Briefly indicate that you have considered the other person's feelings or predicament (your empathy statement).

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Needs

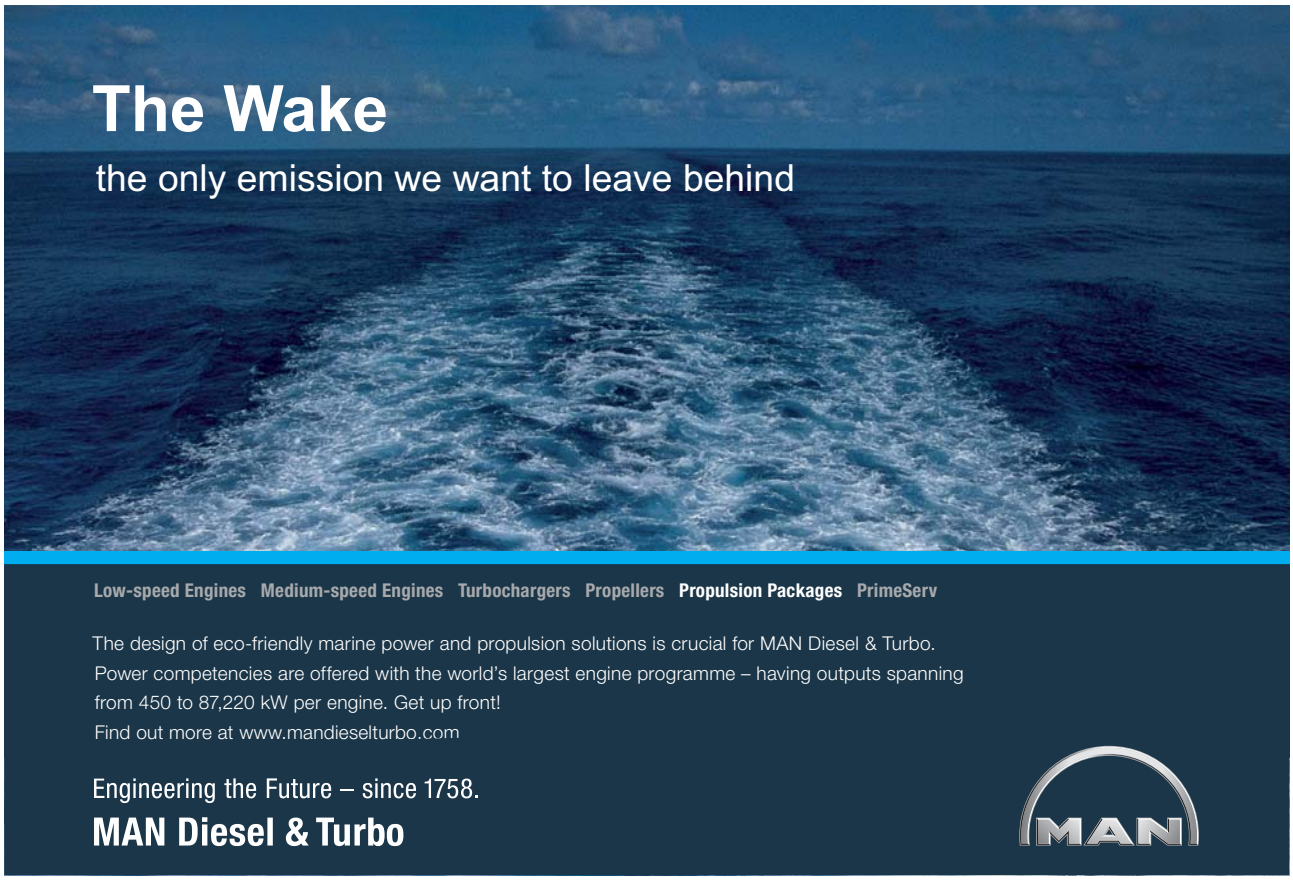
Say directly and concisely what it is you want or do not want, but ensure your requests are realistic. If your requests number more than one or two or are quite complicated to explain, make a general request at this stage such as asking for a further discussion or that your written report be given priority attention. If a compromise is appropriate, include a statement which suggests that you are willing to negotiate.

Consequences

Spell out the 'pay-off' there will be for the other person should he or she comply with your wishes or listen to your 'case' sympathetically and attentively.

In brackets after writing your script, note down the negative consequences you could use to 'threaten' or 'punish' the other person should he or she not respond to your request.

Then decide whether the carrot (positive consequences) or stick (negative consequences) is more justified. Although you may never have to resort to using your 'negative consequences' (Scripting is so effective!), just noting them down boosts your sense of personal power.



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Example A

'Yesterday you began to criticise me when we were standing in the queue at the station (Explanation). I felt embarrassed and cross with you (Your feelings), and although I know that you had good grounds for complaint (Empathy with their feelings), I would like you to choose a less public place in which to confront me (Your needs) - that way I'll be much more likely to take on board what you are trying to tell me (Positive consequences), or otherwise I will not feel like doing what you want and will be far less likely to change (Negative consequences).'

Example B

'I have only left the office once on time over the last three weeks, and now at the last minute you have again presented me with urgent work in spite of my request to leave on time today (Explanation).

I am beginning to feel quite annoyed (Feelings), and though I know that this is a very special order for you (Empathy) I would like you, on this occasion, to give it to someone else to do or leave it until the morning (Needs) as a) it will be done much more efficiently if it is not a rushed job, and b) you will not feel guilty for causing me to miss my train again tonight! (Positive consequences)'

Or

'...a) I will feel less and less willing to do overtime and
b) I will start job-hunting! (Negative consequences)'

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How To Handle Difficult People With Listening And Influencing Skills

The following way of dealing with interviews with people in difficult circumstances will have positive results.

Build Up Rapport

- Active listening
- Minimal encouragers e.g. It's OK
- Eye contact
- Look interested
- Match voice tone and volume, except anger
- Mirror body posture and language, except aggression

Paraphrase - repeat what has been said in your own words or

Reflect - the actual words used, so they can hear you have understood.

Empathise

Clarify, so you can be clear about the whole situation.

- Ask open questions, who, what, where, how (avoid why)
- Seek specific information
- Help them become more rational and less confused
- Patiently demonstrate that you care about what they are saying
- Slows a situation down long enough to see where it is going
- May reveal hidden agendas without confrontation

Summarise, Confirm

- Do you feel I have understood?
- Is there anything else?

Deeper Understanding

- Look for their positive intent

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Get Yourself Understood

- Monitor voice tone
- State your positive intent
- Tactfully interrupt interruptions
- Tell your truth, what you want
- Stay flexible

Get What You Expect

Tell them their negative behaviour is not like them and describe how you would like them to be as if they are capable of it.

Assume the Best

- Give them the benefit of the doubt
- State some positive intent on their part. e.g. "I know you care about giving customers good service"
- State your positive intent e.g. "I want to help you achieve that."

Appreciate Criticism

There is no need to defend, simply hear them out and thank them for communicating. It stops the criticism in its tracks and finishes it.

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Conflict Resolution – Specific Additional Skills

Below are a number of other skills that may be helpful in dealing with particular situations during the conflict resolution process. Many of these are most useful for mediators but may be applicable in other situations.

Conciliatory Statements

If someone says something positive, perhaps acknowledging something helpful the other party has done, it is important to pick that up and try to develop it. For example: if they say "I could try to meet with him sometime…" a mediator or negotiator might say, "Please go on. Could you be more specific?" Or if they say, "I don't think X is being deliberately difficult…" the mediator might thank them for saying that and encourage them to say it directly to the other party.

Any sign of apology or expression of regret should be acknowledged as very positive, as should recognising the other party's point of view, conceding on a particular issue or offering a compromise. A typical reply by a mediator might be, "Thank you for saying that, it was very useful. Is there anything else you wanted to add?"

Reframing is changing a negative statement concerning an important issue by one party to more neutral wording and saying it back to the other party. Negative statements that are not relevant to the issues can be ignored.

Mutualising is identifying and pointing out issues and concerns that apply to both parties. This helps them to see that they are not as far apart as they thought and that some agreement could be possible.

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Normalising is pointing out that their problem is not unique and is sometimes a natural part of what happens between people in organisations. It is not to belittle their problem but to show they are not alone and resolution is possible.

Selective Summary

This is providing a summary of the parts of what has been said that are most likely to provide an opportunity to move things forward. The summary should omit irrelevant material, any personal slights and anything else that is not central to the issues.

Use of a Flip Chart

It can often be useful to summarise on a flip chart so that everyone can see where they are. You might include:

- Issues seen as important by both parties
- Any suggested points of agreement that have emerged at that point
- Any important issues that cannot be dealt with in the mediation but can be dealt with elsewhere

Miscellaneous Interventions

It is helpful to encourage the parties to ask each other clarifying questions and to ask them to feed back to one another the key points of what each is saying. It can also help to check that a party has heard what the other has said.

If the mediator is challenged by one of the parties, the challenge should be acknowledged and then the issues returned to. Do not defend or get into an argument.

Asking for examples – for example when someone is making 'global' complaints about someone else 'always' doing something.

If someone is not adhering to the ground rules, point out the behaviour, say it is against the agreed rules and ask them to stop.

Suggested Useful Questions

- What could you personally do to improve things?
- What is it about that behaviour that upsets you (makes you angry etc)?
- Could you tell me more about that?
- Could you describe the situation between you and X?
- What do you mean by …?
- So, what is the key issue for you?

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Conflict Reduction Planning

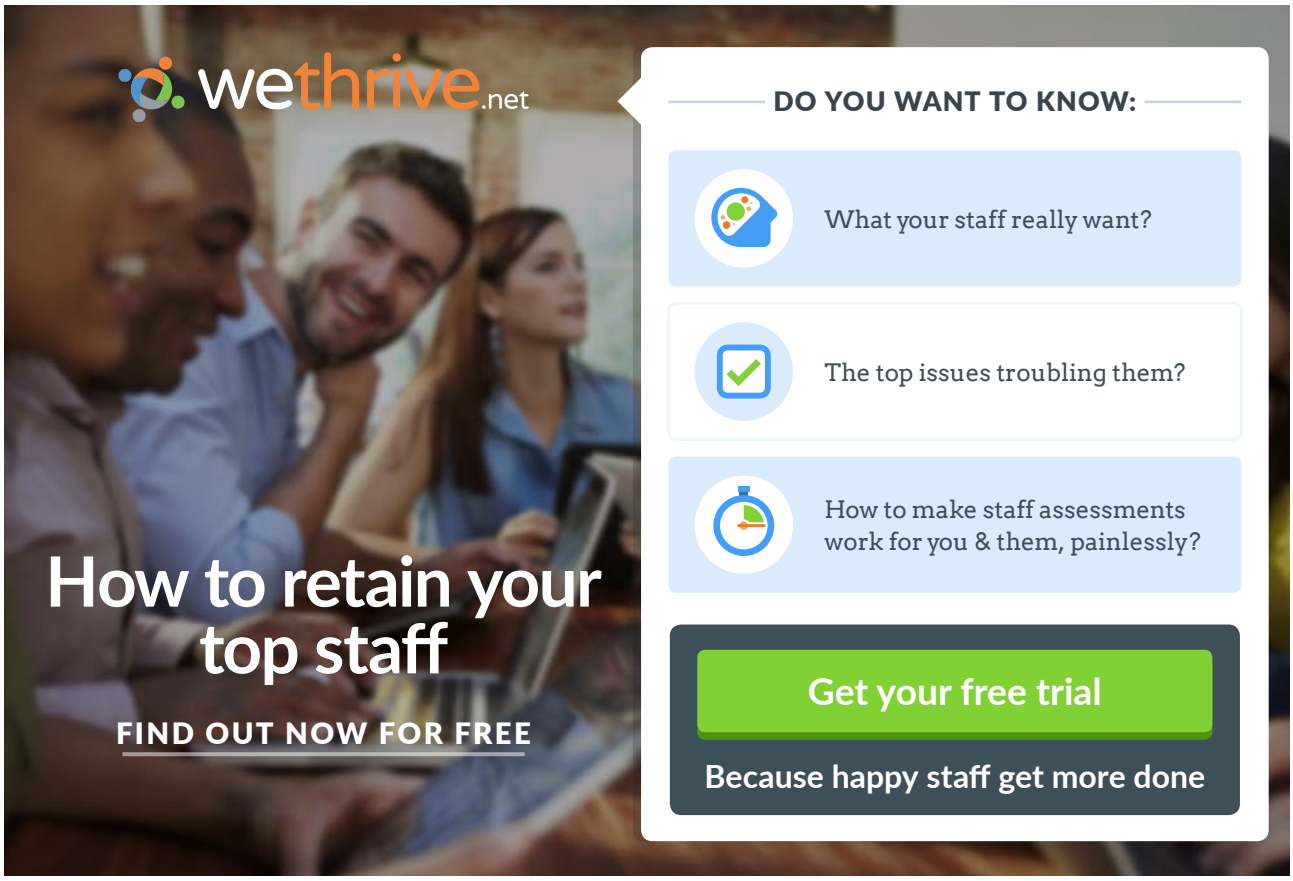
This model can be used in conjunction with other techniques and skills mentioned elsewhere, but in some situations may also be used alone. Its strength is that it is intended to be used in a way that shows concern for the people involved rather than criticism.

This should be a partnership between a manager and individual(s), but the individual may utilise the procedure alone if necessary. Usually the manager has responsibility for implementing the process, but again, an individual who is aware that he/she needs to make changes, if they cannot get commitment from their manager, could use the process themselves. If the process is being driven by the manager, it is important to consider issues of confidentiality, taking into account the possible need to involve others in order to make the changes possible.

Conflict Reduction Planning

The process has six steps

1. Recognition – that there is a problem
2. Identification – exactly what the problem is and what is causing it.
3. Brainstorming a range of possible solutions



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4. Agreeing an appropriate solution
5. Implementing the agreed solution
6. Monitoring the implementation and reviewing whether it is achieving the desired result.

Part 1 - Recognition

- Manager told by individual
- Manager becomes aware of obvious conflict
- Colleagues express concern
- Medical information - sickness documentation
- Manager becomes aware of performance indicators

Part 2 - Identifying Causes

- Discussion with line manager
- Discussion with both parties
- Identifying those areas that can be eliminated or controlled (for example by improving coping skills)
- You need to be very specific
- What is there about the aspect of work that is causing the problem between you?

Part 3 - Identify Options and Solutions

- Brainstorm as many options as possible that will achieve what you want
- Suggestions from staff member(s) and manager
- No suggestions excluded at this stage
- Consider appropriateness
- Consider more than one action
- Consider each option and decide which is best

Part 4 – Agree Plan

- If possible agree the plan with staff member(s)
- The plan should be written if at all possible
- You must be able to monitor and measure specific indicators:
    - Reduced conflict
    - Reduction in sickness absence
    - Positive feedback from staff member and/or colleagues
    - Individual feels more able to cope and less stressed

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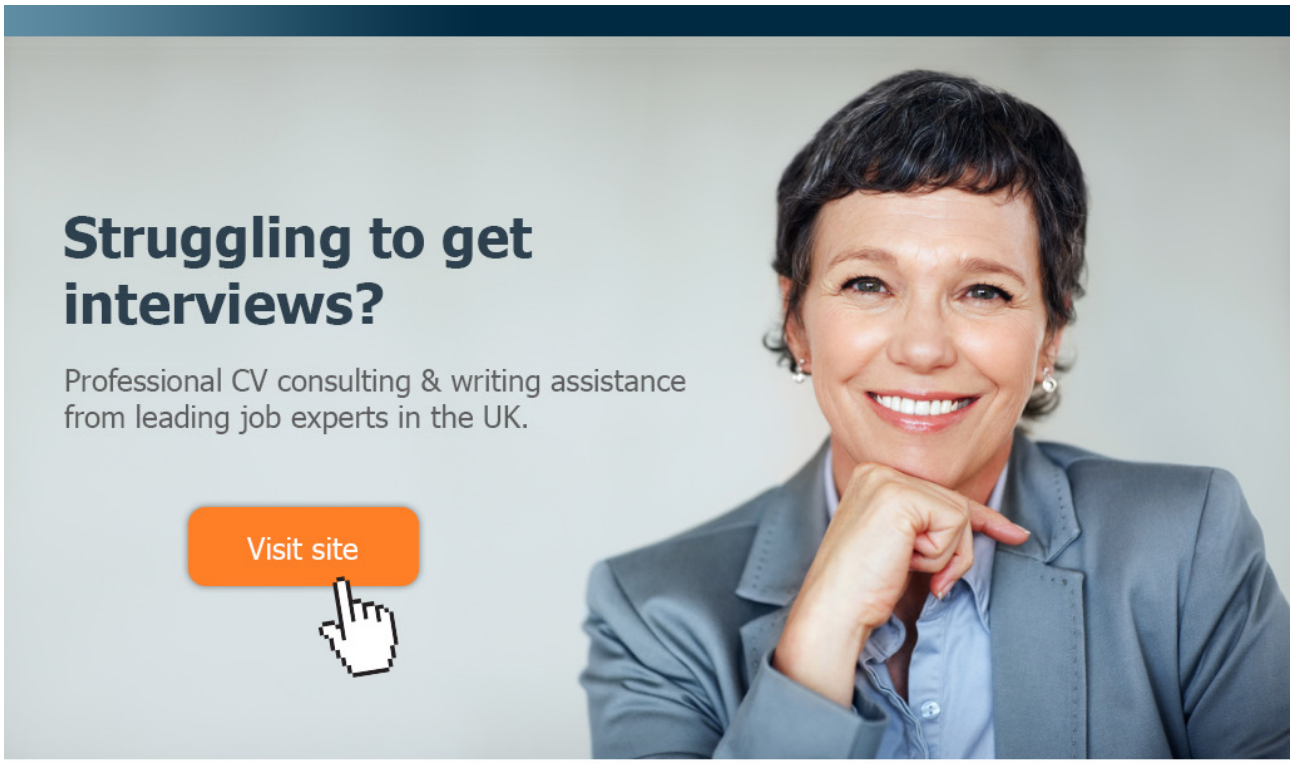
Part 5 – Implement the Plan

- Put the plan into operation
- Organise whatever help is needed
- Let others know as necessary
- Perhaps keep notes of how it is going

Part 6 - Review

- Timetable specific reviews
- Agree monitoring method
- First review quite soon
- Allow flexibility
- Is it working?
- Successful outcome is when conflict is reduced and the potential for it is lessened.



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Difficult Personality Types

The following are specific personality types who may need to be dealt with using a variation of the methods described. (You may also be faced with people who seem to combine more than one type and will therefore need to come up with a way of dealing with them that combines more than one strategy.)

The Tank is aggressive, confrontational, angry and often abusive.

Strategy

1. Hold your ground, don't get angry, defend or shut down. Breathe slowly and deeply.
2. Interrupt the attack; say their name over and over again, firmly and clearly.
3. Quickly paraphrase or reflect their main point.
4. Give your point of view. Preface it with "From my point of view" or "The way I see it".
5. Offer them the last word, but you decide where and when.

The Sniper. Makes you look foolish with sarcasm, rude comments or facial expressions.

Strategy

You have to bring them out into the open. Sniping is a sneaky type of behaviour and cannot be done when it is made obvious that they are sneakily sniping.

1. Stop. Interrupt yourself. Look at the sniper, reflect what they said or, if it was a facial expression, a quick imitation.
2. Ask for the true meaning of what they said or ask for the relevance of it to the present situation. Remain calm and professional, no sarcasm.
3. Repeat the process if there are further snipes.
4. Use the Tank strategy if necessary.

You may be able to find out that there is a genuine grudge, in which case it can be brought out into the open and dealt with, preferably in private.

The Grenade. This person attacks with unfocused and irrelevant anger.

Strategy

You need to take control. You cannot stop the Grenade but they can stop themselves if the circumstances are right.

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1. Get their attention, call their name loud enough to be heard and wave your hands slowly backwards and forwards in front of you.
2. Listen for the cause of the explosion, paraphrase and empathise.
3. Reduce your voice volume and intensity.
4. Offer time out to deal with it later when everyone is calmer.
5. Improve the long-term relationship. Listen to what causes the explosion and try to solve it.

Know It All. This person has a high degree of genuine knowledge, low tolerance of others and may blame you if things go wrong.

Strategy

Your goal is to open their mind to new information and ideas.

1. Be well prepared and know your stuff.
2. Paraphrase and reflect respectfully and frequently. They have to see that you have heard and understood them before you can redirect them to your idea.
3. Empathise with their doubts and wishes.
4. Present your information or ideas indirectly and cautiously. Use words like "maybe" or "perhaps" or "I was just wondering". Use "we" and "us" rather than "I" and "you".
5. Enlist their help. Acknowledge them as your mentor in some area. Recognise them as an expert and that you are willing to learn from them.

Think They Know It All. They pretend to know but are usually talking nonsense or just enough sense to convince others they are right. They can fool some of the people some of the time and they do it just to get attention.

Strategy

If you confront them aggressively they are likely to become even louder and may convince some who do not know better. Remember that their desperate need for attention is based on their insecurity and try to have a little compassion.

1. Give them a little attention. Paraphrase or reflect their comments or acknowledge their positive intentions. This may be enough to stop them.
2. Ask them to be very specific about what they are saying. Do not seek to humiliate or embarrass them.
3. Redirect the conversation back to how it really is. Provide evidence if possible.
4. Give them a way out. e.g. by acknowledging what they have said and perhaps linking it with the facts or saying it has reminded you of the facts.

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5. Break the cycle. Long term, try gently confronting them with the negative consequences of their behaviour. Also give them credit whenever you can. This may educate them into how to properly get recognition and make them more productive.

The 'Yes' Person.

They are desperate to please and say "Yes" to tasks they have not got the time to do in order to avoid confrontation, forgetting earlier commitments. They over-commit and run out of time, then become resentful. They are unreliable because of that.

Strategy

This is another person anxious to be liked and you will need a lot of patience to help them. They lack organising skills and the ability to recognise that they have a problem.

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1. Make it safe to be honest. Making them feel bad won't get them to keep promises. Use verbal and non-verbal skills to establish an honest and caring relationship. Acknowledge the positive intent.
2. Talk honestly. Listen actively without contradicting or judging. Paraphrase and clarify, then appreciate their honesty.
3. Help them learn to plan. Perhaps look back at previous failures and see what lessons can be learnt.
4. Ensure commitment. a) Ask for word of honour. b) Ask them to summarise. c) Get them to write it down. d) Set an odd deadline. e) Describe the negative consequences.
5. Strengthen the relationship. Praise successes, detailing what they did right and acknowledge honesty about doubts and concerns. Be careful with broken promises: tell them what they did, what the result was and how that made you feel. Tell them that was not like them and acknowledge that they have the capability to do better. Then ask what they would do differently the next time.

The 'Maybe' Person. They cannot make decisions, procrastinate, hope the decision will make itself or something else will save them having to decide. They get blinded by the possible negative side of each decision. They do too little, too late.

Strategy

It is understandably easy to be angry with these people but you will only make it worse. This is another case where you have to show you care, have patience and a desire to help so the Maybe Person can trust you enough to relax and think clearly. They need a clear strategy for making decisions.

1. Establish and maintain a comfort zone. Tell them how important it is to you to have a good relationship and that you believe that relationships improve with open communication.
2. Explore, from the Maybe Person's point of view, all the obstacles to making the decision.
3. Use a decision making system. If you have one you use, teach it to the person.
4. Reassure them that the decision is a good one and stay in touch until it is implemented.
5. Strengthen the relationship. Help them see what they have learned from a success. Take time to listen to their concerns and help them learn the decision making process. Perhaps encourage them to research and find their own decision making process.

The 'Nothing' Person. Gives no verbal feedback or non-verbal feedback - nothing. They will slow you down and not say what is wrong. They are usually very angry inside and sometimes show that by breaking pencils or slamming doors etc. (Passive aggressive.)

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Strategy

Despite the frustration they cause you will have to slow down yourself if you are going to get anywhere. Intense or aggressive communication will only make things worse. Your goal is to get the Nothing Person to talk.

1. Plan enough time. Plan well ahead. If you already have a deadline it is probably the wrong time. Plan several 15 minute 'communication opportunities' each month.
2. Ask open questions and expect an answer. Try a non-verbal expectant look. When they say, "Nothing" you could try, "What else?" When they say, "I don't know" you could try, "Guess." Or, "Make something up". Or, "If you did know, what would it be?"
3. Lighten it up. Try a little careful humour or make an exaggerated or impossible guess. That may have the effect of making them be specific.
4. If none of that works you could try putting yourself in their shoes and thinking back over events. How might you interpret what has happened to account for the silence? Make tentative suggestions and watch for any reaction. When you notice a reaction carry on along that track and they may start talking.
5. Show the future. Help them to see the possible consequences of their continued silence. When they do start talking that is when you really do need to be able to listen well.

The 'No' Person. Is very negative, says things like "That won't work." Always looking for hopelessness, futility and despair. Often appears as mild mannered and normal.

Strategy

This is another person with whom you will need compassion and patience. They are capable of bringing whole departments down because of their negativity. They are actually perfectionists who can only see things not getting done properly because everything will go wrong. Your goal is to move from fault finding to problem solving.

1. Go with the flow. Trying to convince them things aren't as bad as they think will only make them try harder to convince you.
2. Use them as a resource. They are often able to identify potential problems missed by others. Use them to build your own character. The effort of remaining positive in their presence is a real challenge to be overcome!!
3. Give them plenty of time and offer them a later chance to come up with a solution.
4. Try a paradoxical intervention. Bring up the negatives before they do or agree with how hopeless it is and suggest that even they couldn't solve the problem.
5. Acknowledge their good intent. Appreciate the negative person for their high standards, and their constant objections may be expressed in a more useful way.

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The Whiner. Feels helpless and overwhelmed by an unfair world and unobtainable perfection. They see problems as much worse than they really are. They will try to make others miserable too and offering solutions makes them whine even more.

Strategy

Don't agree, you'll encourage them. Don't disagree, they'll repeat their problems. Don't try to solve them – you can't. Don't ask them why they are complaining to you, they start again from the beginning.

Once again you need compassion, patience and the commitment to persist. Your goal is to form a problem solving alliance.

1. Listen for the main points, paraphrase and reflect. Write them down.
2. Interrupt and get specific. Ask them to help you and clarify specifically what the difficulties are. Gather information about each of the main points you have written down.
3. Shift the focus to solutions. Ask what they want. If they are unrealistic, help them to reality test. If they don't know try the standard "Guess, make something up, if you did know, what would it be?" type of response.
4. Show them the future. Give them something to look forward to, keep them informed about progress.

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5. Draw the line. If all the above has achieved nothing, bring it assertively to a close. Something like, "Since your complaints seem to have no solutions, talking about them isn't achieving anything. If you happen to think of a possible solution or change your mind let me know."

The Chronic Absentee. This person is frequently absent from work, off sick, at a funeral or has many other reasons/excuses.

Strategy

Even when the reasons are fabricated there may be a genuine reason behind them. Of course there are those who are going to take their "statutory sick leave" come what may. Bear in mind that it is important for the company to have a clear policy for dealing with sickness absence, which stresses support whilst ensuring that people do not abuse the system.

1. Recognise that there is a problem and try to identify the cause. Is the absence on a particular day or when a particular task has to be performed?
2. Speak assertively to the person, ask if there is a problem they would like to talk about.
3. If they tell you and it is work related, you may be able to make a difference yourself. If the problem concerns life outside work you may be able to offer help or you may refer them to your work counselling scheme or to an independent counsellor.
4. If the problem appears to be groundless and continues despite your attempts to help, you may need to telephone to check on where they are when they are off sick. If they answer you should express your concern as to how they are. You may also wish to make a personal visit for the same reasons.
5. Finally you may have to ask that they see the company doctor to check if there is anything else that can be done to help them get better. Any attempt to get rid of them must be managed carefully and only after all the previous steps have been taken.

The Person Who Makes Too Many Mistakes. The mistakes may be immediately obvious and solvable, or they may be covered up causing far greater difficulties.

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Strategy

There may be many reasons why individuals constantly make mistakes: feeling nervous that they may not be able to do it right often causes mistakes, as do lack of training, poor training, or lack of ability to absorb the training. They may have too much to do or be allowing themselves to be easily distracted.

1. Recognise the difference between those who do not care and those who are trying but still making mistakes.
2. Ask if there are any problems. Paraphrase, reflect, and start and finish with something positive.
3. If this is a sign of excessive stress, you will need to take steps to alleviate whatever is causing the stress.
4. Consider training needs and possibly coaching. Will you coach them or appoint someone else to do so?
5. If this is also a "Yes Person", see above.

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We may feel a threat to ourselves or to people, things and ideas we care about and expressing anger is one way of saying "back off". Anger may enable us to react quickly and decisively in situations where there is no time for a careful, reasoned analysis of the situation. It can motivate us to solve problems, achieve our goals, and remove threats but unresolved anger can weaken the immune system so that we are more likely to pick up colds, flu's and infections. Anger also lowers our pain threshold so that we may become more sensitive to pain.

Taking Responsibility

Angry and aggressive individuals do need to take responsibility for their actions – blaming others is not helpful. Acting in anger may serve as self protection at the time but a positive response and constructive action will undoubtedly improve self-esteem and self-confidence. It is always important to recognise the warning signs and symptoms of anger and to appreciate that no matter how sudden the outburst there will always be a reason behind the reaction.

As a professional manager don't bury your head in sand when dealing with anger – prevention is always better than cure. Use the services of third parties in your organisation such as HR and Occupational Health. Where the root cause of anger goes deep into an individual's past you are likely to need the services of other professionals both inside and outside the company

There is a strong link between anger and stress and the effects of stress on the body are well documented.

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- Resolving Conflict in Organisations, Mike Pedler. ISBN1-898001-45-6
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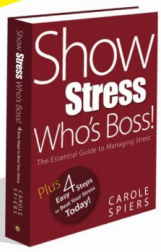

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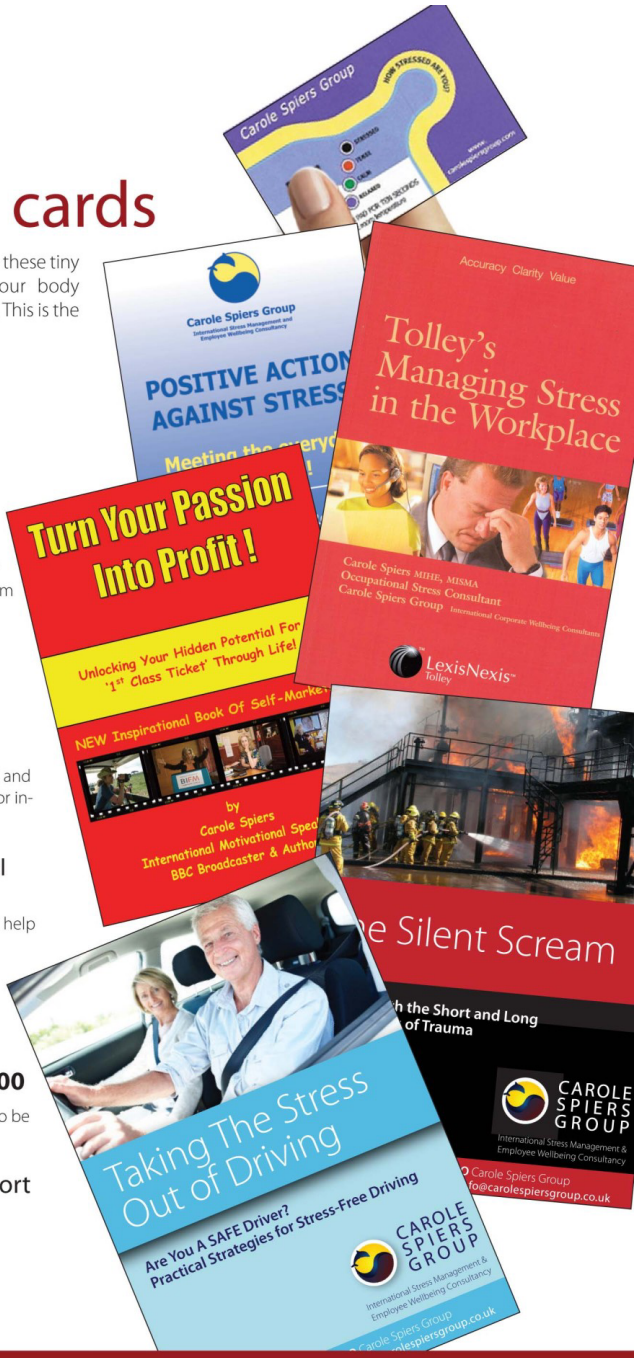

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