

Conflict Resolution: How to Survive Graduate Training

...while keeping friends and securing reference letters

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Agenda

- Getting to know you
 - Conflict basics
 - Preparation & initial considerations
 - Communication styles
 - Special considerations
 - How to's and tips
 - Practice!
 - Outside considerations
 - Questions

Getting to know you...

○ Name

○ Concerns about managing conflict?

○ What are you hoping to learn?

Today's focus...

- Conflicts with peers
 - Group projects
- Conflicts with advisors and faculty
 - Work-load expectations
 - Availability
 - Feedback
 - Grading disputes

The Basics

- Definition of *Conflict*:
- “struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands” (Merriam-Webster)
- Consider this in context of working relationships with peers, advisors, and faculty...

The Basics

- The anatomy of conflict & resolution...
- Awareness
 - Consider/recognize possibility of conflict in various scenarios
- Prevention
 - Focus on **communication** can prevent larger problems
- Early intervention
 - If problems arise, address the issue ASAP

Awareness & Preparation

- Once you are aware of a conflict brewing, there are multiple things to consider first!
- Initial considerations
 - Should I do something about it? Picking “battles” wisely: coping versus confronting
 - Consider best approach—direct conversation?

Awareness & Preparation

- Considerations for direct conversation
 - How does conversation contribute to your goals?
→ If goal is to vent, don't have the conversation!
 - Will conversation enhance or risk damaging a valued relationship?
→ If you feel unsafe or threatened, don't have a face-to-face. Consider alternatives.

Prevention: Communication is KEY

- There are different 'styles' of communication, and we all tend to use certain 'styles' as our default
- Some more effective than others in addressing conflict
- Goal: **assertive communication**

What is Assertiveness?

- It is culturally bound
- Expressing your personal rights and feelings
- Open expression of your feelings, thoughts, needs and/or wants
- Standing up for your right, while respecting the rights of others
- Believing you have a right to your feelings, beliefs, and opinions
- Viewing yourself as equal to others and treating others as equals
- Allows others to make choices

What assertiveness CAN do for you:

Increase the chance of having honest relationships

Help you feel better about yourself

Help you feel more in control of yourself and in life situations

Increase the chance of getting what you need and want from life and from others

Improve your ability to make decisions

What assertiveness CANNOT do for you:

Solve all your interpersonal problems and concerns

Guarantee that you will be treated fairly

Guarantee that others will respond assertively

Help you manipulate others

Assure that you will never again be passive, passive-aggressive, or aggressive

Assure that you will always be happy or successful

Bill of Rights

- The right to be treated with respect
- The right to have and express your own feelings
- The right to say “no” and not feel guilty
- The right to make your own decisions
- The right to change your mind
- The right to feel and express anger
- The right to feel and expression a healthy competitive spirit and achievement drive
- The right to be treated as a capable human being and not to be patronized
- The right to have your needs recognized as important as the needs of other people
- The right to make mistakes
- The right to initiate a conversation to clarify a misunderstanding
- The right to do things that others may not approve of
- The right to do less than you are humanly capable of doing
- The right to be left alone
- The right to ask why
- The right to ask for help or assistance
- The right to have and express your own opinions
- The right to choose not to assert yourself

Passive:

Behavior: puts self down, does not say what she or he wants, indirect

Goal: to please others, avoid conflict

Decision making: other choose for you

Passive-

Aggressive:

Behavior: denying own needs while blaming others, does aggressive things while being passive in verbal communication, indirect, manipulative

Goal: hurt others but providing an excuse/out

Decision making: Chooses for others, but they don't know it.

Aggressive:

Behavior: overreacts, imposes on others, attacks, puts others down

Goal: winning, control

Decision making: Chooses for others and makes sure they know it.

Assertive:

Behavior: evaluates and acts appropriately, wins with honesty, spontaneous, honest expression, respectful, direct, aware of self and others

Goal: respect for self and others

Decision making: Chooses for self

Strategies for Assertive Communication

- Use “I” statements and avoid blaming others.
- Take safe risks and speak your mind in respectful ways.
- Respect the rights of others by waiting your turn and really listening to what they are saying.
- *Don't personalize* and recognize when others are being passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive.

Assertive Listening

- Involves focusing your attention on the other person so that you can accurately hear the other person's opinions, feelings, and wishes
- 1. Prepare
 - Become aware of your own opinions, feelings, and wishes
 - Are you ready to listen and speak up?
- 2. Listen and clarify
 - Listen fully to the speaker's point of view, feelings, and wants.
 - When uncertain, clarify by asking for more information
- 3. Acknowledge
 - Let the other person know that you have heard him or her.
 - Summarize and reflect.

Workable Compromises

- Often it's hard to come to a compromise that everyone feels great about.
- Workable compromises are ones that all parties can live with, even if for only a little while.
- If a compromise doesn't come up naturally, try brainstorming
 - Example: picking a restaurant – the 5-3-1 plan
- Specify a length of time for this compromise and when you will come back together to evaluate the results and possibly renegotiate
- Ask for a counterproposal if the other person refuses to brainstorm
- “What would you need from me to feel okay about doing this my way?”
- Possible solutions to common problems:
 - Turn taking, 50/50 or 75/25, Trade-offs

Practicing Assertiveness

- Identify a problem situation
- Describe the “particulars”
 - Who is involved?
 - When has/will this happen?
 - What bothers you about this situation?
 - How would you typically deal with it?
 - What blocks you from possibly addressing this situation assertively?
- Develop an assertive response
 - Evaluate your rights
 - Designate a time
 - Address the main person involved
 - Express your feelings
 - Make your request
 - State the consequences

Role plays!

- Try using each communication style
- Which one felt least comfortable?
- Which one felt most comfortable?
- What is your typical style?

Power

- Often the scariest part of managing conflict is navigating power differentials
 - These can be obvious and clearly defined power relationships
 - Student and dissertation chair
 - Employer and employee
 - They can be less clear and more poorly defined
 - Roommates
 - People who share lab space, but are not working together
 - Multiple relationships
- Navigating these different relationships is about choice.

Intervention & Resolution: Steps and tips

- Setting up the meeting
 - If appropriate, face-to-face is best: chance to judge reaction and adjust approach if needed
- 1. Make appointment in private space with adequate time
- 2. Practice with mentor or friend
- 3. Anticipate range of reactions and practice response

Intervention & Resolution: Steps and tips

- The Conversation
 1. Use diplomatic language
 - Avoid judgment, "I" statements
 - Restate their needs and identify your own
 2. Acknowledge your role in conflict
 3. Be an attentive listener
 - Use empathy: put yourself in their shoes
 4. Be prepared to share several ideas for resolutions or compromise
 5. Be brief and to the point

Intervention & Resolution: Steps and tips

- Ending the conversation
 1. Plan an exit strategy if conversation deteriorates
 2. Have realistic expectations
 - May not reach ideal resolution or resolve all issues; the “good enough” solution
 3. Identify next steps before concluding
 - When will you hear back? Review agreed upon solutions and steps

Additional tips

- Preventing conflict in group projects...
 1. Establish shared goals ASAP
 2. Divide work according to individual skills and preferences
 3. Clarify timeline expectations, establish regular check-ins
 4. Put these expectations in writing, refer to them as project progresses

Additional tips

- Meeting with your advisor...
 1. Reach out to them as soon as there is a problem
 2. Schedule a meeting or attend office hours; avoid catching them before or after class
 3. Bring paperwork related to your concern

Additional tips

- Email communication...
 1. Introduce yourself when emailing for the first time
 2. Be polite! Emails exist forever...
 3. Use 'cc' and 'Reply All' wisely
 4. Keep it short and simple
 5. DON'T email when angry or upset

Conflict resolution beyond academia

- Communication patterns influence all relationships
- Strategies learned here directly apply to friends, family relationships, and romantic relationships

HELP!

- You are not alone in navigating conflict at the University. Access resources when needed!
- Student Conflict Resolution Center
 - <http://www.sos.umn.edu/index.html>
 - Resources and services for students and faculty
- University Counseling and Consulting Services