## MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

# "RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN THE OFFICE"

**Part of the "GENERAL SAFETY SERIES"**

**Quality Safety and Health Products, for Today...and Tomorrow**

# Outline of Major Points Covered in the "Conflict Resolution in the Office" Course

The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the course on "Conflict Resolution in the Office". The outline can be used to survey the course before taking it on a computer, as well as to review the course when a computer is not available.

- **We have all seen two or more people:**
  - Disagreeing.
  - Arguing.
  - Fighting.

- **There is one word that sums it all up... "Conflict".**
  - It can be an obstacle to doing our jobs.
  - It can make our work environment feel uncomfortable... even hostile.
  - Left unresolved, it can lead to more serious problems such as harassment and violence.

- **However, if it is handled properly, conflict can actually be a good thing. It can bring forth new:**
  - Ideas.
  - Perspectives.
  - Ways to get our jobs done.

- **"Conflict resolution" can be a powerful force for positive change.**

- **Where does conflict come from?**
  - There are a number of different sources of conflict.
  - They all have one thing in common... "differences".

- **Differing "expectations" about job roles or instructions can be a source of conflict. Disagreements can include:**
  - "Who is responsible for what?"
  - "What is the proper procedure?"

- **Differences in "treatment", even if only perceived, can lead to arguments over status or resources. Questions that are not easily resolved include:**
  - "Who is more important?"
  - "Who gets 'first dibs' on equipment or materials?"

- **People can often find themselves in conflict with one another because they have different:**
  - Goals.
  - Values.
  - Priorities.

- **Other conflicts can arise from deeply embedded differences in:**
  - Habits.
  - Feelings.
  - Beliefs.

- **Even "old" conflicts that everyone thought had been resolved can come back to haunt us.**
  - Many times holding a grudge about past disagreements can cause or complicate new conflicts.

- **However, there is almost always some way a conflict can be resolved.**
  - Understanding each type of conflict can help us find ways to deal with them.

- **A common category of conflict is... "Misunderstandings".**
  - Confusion over incorrect, outdated or vague information or instructions can lead to conflict.

- **When people develop different "understandings" of the same situation, the best response is to establish common ground and to provide everyone with information that is:**
  - Reliable.
  - Accurate.
  - Current.

- **But even with the most up-to-date facts and figures, people can still disagree about what they really mean.**
  - In these cases, engaging in friendly debate over the disagreement can often lead to a resolution.
  - Sometimes it may be necessary to "agree to disagree" and move on.

- **"Procedural Conflicts" are about "different means to the same end."**
  - People can agree on a common goal, but still disagree on how to get there.
  - When there is more than one way to complete a task, a compromise that incorporates parts of each plan can often be reached.

- **Conflicts can be far more difficult to resolve if the individuals or groups who are involved each have "Differing Goals".**
  - This can sometimes feel like a "no-win" situation.

- **However, these situations can often be turned into "win-win" situations through "Collaboration".**
  - Few goals are truly mutually exclusive.
  - By working together to reach different goals, conflicting parties can often resolve their differences.

- **Over the years, conflict has gotten a "bad rap".**
  - It can actually be very valuable.
  - If handled properly, conflict can be a source of innovation and positive change.
  - How we resolve conflict is the key.

- **There isn't one sure-fire conflict resolution strategy that will work in every situation.**
  - There are several different approaches... each with its own pluses and minuses.
  - Which one we should use depends on the specifics of the situation at hand.

- **One strategy some people use is to "Compete" with the other party... fighting for the outcome that they want.**
  - While this approach is very assertive, it shows little concern for others.
  - If you win, you will get what you want... but the losers will be unhappy.
  - They may hold a grudge which could contribute to future conflict.

- **If the other party chooses to compete as well, <u>they</u> could end up winning.**
  - You would have nothing to show for your efforts.
  - If the situation ends in a tie, everyone loses because no one achieves their goal.

- **Another approach to conflict resolution is to "Yield" and let the other person get their way.**
  - Your needs definitely won't get satisfied this way.
  - However, if you feel threatened by the conflict, or just have more important things to do, yielding can gave its advantages.

- **The major drawback to yielding is that you may regret it later.**
  - You can end up feeling bitter or angry for giving up what you wanted.

- **An approach that is similar to yielding is simply to "Avoid" the conflict. Some examples include:**
  - Looking the other way.
  - Refusing to talk about it.
  - Passing the buck to someone else.

- **Avoidance can reduce your frustration and free you up to deal with other things.**
  - But avoiding conflict is no substitute for resolving it once and for all.

- **These strategies all fall short of bringing lasting resolution to conflict.**
  - As long as someone's needs or concerns go unfulfilled or unaddressed, conflict can still exist.
  - There are two other approaches to resolving conflict which can have more lasting results.

- **"Compromise" makes sure that everyone who is involved gets at least some of what they want.**
  - When each party "gives a little to get a little", they can often meet halfway to resolve a conflict.

- **Compromising is about weighing priorities.**
  - Each party must decide what they are willing to give up in order to get other things they want.
  - Most people are willing to budge on some issues.

- **You then need to work together to identify "common ground", the things that you agree on.**
  - Start there and negotiate.
  - Trade your lesser priorities for higher ones.
  - Eventually you will reach a compromise.

- **When two or more parties agree on a compromise, each sees at least some of their needs being met.**
  - This can often bring long-term resolution to a conflict.

- **However, compromise does not always completely satisfy all parties.**
  - Sometimes people have second thoughts about the things they gave up in the negotiations.
  - The conflict could erupt again... or other problems might develop as a result of "hard feelings".

- **While compromise may be the only solution to conflicts over "mutually exclusive" goals, few situations actually fall into that category.**
  - Many different goals can often be reached simultaneously if people work together... or "Collaborate".

- **To "collaborate", you should be assertive about satisfying your concerns but you must also cooperate to see that other people's needs are being fulfilled at the same time.**
  - Start by defining the problem as mutual… something that belongs to everyone involved.
  - Then look for a solution which satisfies everyone's needs.

- **Collaboration is one of the few approaches that can resolve a conflict once and for all.**
  - When you collaborate everyone sees their needs met or their goals reached.
  - Although this may take some time and energy, it is usually worth the effort.

- **Although these strategies may make resolving conflict look easy... there can be complications.**
  - If a conflict grows too quickly, or becomes too intense, it can lead to a "confrontation".
  - These situations require special consideration.

- **If a conflict boils over into a confrontation, people may feel like their entire reputation or self-worth is on the line.**
  - These situations can be time bombs just waiting to explode.
  - It is important to know how to "defuse" confrontations.

- **When we are confronted, our reflex is often to either fight back or to run away.**
  - But neither attacking nor retreating will help to defuse the confrontation.
  - Nor will these approaches resolve the conflict behind the confrontation.
  - It is important to resist these urges and try to work through our differences.

- **Your verbal response to a confrontation can be critical. How you say something is often more important than what you say.**
  - Shouting is usually not a productive form of communication.
  - Stay calm and encourage the other party to talk about their concerns.
  - Tell them you want to understand, and ask them to explain their point of view.
  - Don't interrupt.

- **Let them finish, and then show that you do understand by restating their position in your own words.**
  - Don't disagree or be judgmental.

- **When it is your turn to talk, use the word "I" instead of the word "You" whenever possible.**
  - "I" takes ownership of the situation, and can promote cooperation and understanding.
  - "You" can make your statements sound like accusations and may put the other person on the defensive.

- **But there is more to diffusing a confrontation than just talking a certain way.**
  - Your physical response also plays an important role.

- **Knowing how to react physically can prevent further escalation and help to defuse the situation.**
  - Remember to stay calm.
  - Keep your arms low, in a non-threatening position.
  - Don't cross your arms, make fists or fidget.
  - Try to stay at least five feet away from the other person.
  - Avoid physical contact.

- **Touching someone who is agitated may upset them further, possibly escalating the confrontation to violence.**
  - Make sure not to make them feel threatened or backed into a corner.

- **Don't allow the person you are dealing with to touch you either.**
  - They may try to grab or hit you if they are really upset.
  - If they push you, don't push back... it could escalate the confrontation.
  - Instead, just walk away.

- **If the other person grabs you, try to break free and get away from them.**
  - If you have to, call out for help... someone is usually nearby.
  - Whatever you do, don't allow yourself to get drawn into a fight.

- **Fighting can lead to all kinds of trouble. You could be:**
  - Injured.
  - Disciplined by your employer.
  - Arrested for "Assault".
  - Sued by the other person, no matter who started the fight.

- **If you don't take steps to resolve conflict or diffuse a confrontation there can be serious consequences.**
  - Conflict causes stress.
  - Stress leads to frustration.
  - Frustration leads to anger.
  - Anger causes short tempers.
  - It all adds up to more conflict.

- **Another problem is that after prolonged periods of conflict:**
  - Your patience may wear thin.
  - You may no longer trust the other party.
  - Communication may stop completely.
  - A stalemate may develop... where no further progress can be made.

- **But "Escalation" is probably the most serious consequence of unresolved conflict.**
  - Prolonged conflict can sometimes lead to a confrontation.
  - The nature of the conflict can change and become about placing blame or "getting even".
  - When the goal turns to hurting others, there can be very serious results.

- **The situation can grow into:**
  - Harassment.
  - Threats.
  - Even violence.

- **None of us are strangers to conflict... at work or at home. It can be:**
  - Unpleasant.
  - Disruptive.
  - Even scary.

- **But because of its potential consequences, we can't allow conflict to continue unchecked for very long.**

*** * *SUMMARY* * ***

- **Know how to recognize the common sources of conflict.**

- **Compromise when goals are mutually exclusive.**

- **Look for ways to collaborate, so that everyone can reach their goals together.**

- **Diffuse confrontations with a calm verbal response and a non-threatening physical response.**

- **Work to resolve conflict before it escalates into something more serious.**

- **In spite of its potential problems, conflict can produce:**
  - New ideas.
  - Innovation.
  - Positive change.

- **The key to conflict is in how it is handled. When conflict is resolved properly, everybody wins!**