

RESOLVE CONFLICT AT WORK

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **20 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Solving conflict at work can be difficult, and there are often deadlines to come to an agreement. In this high-pressure environment, strategies to promote collaboration, listening, and cooperation are vital.

Research suggests that neglecting to advocate for our point of view can increase feelings of distress at work, which is why it's important to be proactive in solving conflict and constructively sharing our opinions. When leaders model and welcome this kind of collaborative approach, research suggests it may influence others to do the same and improve organizational culture and viability.

Choosing to walk as you talk with a colleague can promote this cooperative problem solving. As your steps synchronize, research suggests, you may find that the two of you are better able to get on the same page. Walking can help inspire innovative solutions, and allow you and your colleague to move toward a resolution.

TIME REQUIRED

Try this exercise anytime a conflict arises at work. The duration of the exercise will vary depending on the conflict at hand.

HOW TO DO IT

Consider a conflict, big or small, that you are facing with another person at work. Perhaps you disagree on the direction of an upcoming project, or maybe you feel your colleague isn't pulling their weight on your team. Then, follow these steps:

- **Choose to actively manage the conflict rather than ignoring it.** When your boss makes a decision you disagree with, or a colleague isn't respecting your time, your instinct may be to accommodate their wishes, and ignore your thoughts and feelings on the matter. Instead of avoiding the conflict and allowing suppressed emotions to build inside, we can decide to take an active approach and address the conflict head-on.
- **Embrace a mindset of collaboration.** If you have an instinct to avoid conflict, it may be the result of a workplace culture where it's normal to keep doubts and disagreements quiet for the sake of reducing tension. Or maybe the norm at your workplace is to aggressively hold your ground until one person "wins" the debate. Instead, the best way to resolve conflict is somewhere in the middle: choosing a collaborative mindset. Collaboration means that individuals feel safe to share opposing opinions and strive for a compromise.
- **Practice active listening.** In order to have an effective discussion, it is important to demonstrate mutual respect for one another. One critical way to do this is to **actively listen** when someone is speaking, as opposed to preparing your rebuttal. When both parties feel heard, you can more effectively come to a cooperative

solution.

- **Talk a walk.** If possible, suggest discussing the matter on a walk indoors or outdoors. As you walk side by side, adjust the pace of your gait to synchronize with your colleague's. Consider this walk together to be a constructive opportunity to exchange ideas.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Webb, C. E., Rossignac-Milon, M., & Higgins, E. T. (2017). [Stepping forward together: Could walking facilitate interpersonal conflict resolution?](#) *American Psychologist*, 72(4), 374-385. Doi:10.1037/a0040431.

This meta-analysis suggests that walking together may aid conflict resolution. In one study referenced, people who were instructed to walk in synchrony were more likely to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of the group, compared to a control group who walked out of synchrony.

Gelfand, M. J., Leslie, L. M., Keller, K., & De Dreu, C. (2012). [Conflict cultures in organizations: How leaders shape conflict cultures and their organizational-level consequences.](#) *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(6), 1131-1147. Doi:10.1037/a0029993.

This study found that a leader's conflict management style is linked to the conflict management style of the organization as a whole. Furthermore, organizations with collaborative conflict styles have greater viability, while dominating conflict cultures offer poor customer service, and avoidant conflict cultures show low creativity.

Dijkstra, M. T. M., De Dreu, C., Evers, A., & van Dierendonck, D. (2009). [Passive responses to interpersonal conflict at work amplify employee strain.](#) *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 18(4), 405-423. Doi: 10.1080/13594320802510880.

This study analyzed the relationship between employee strain—feeling miserable, upset, or worried at work—and styles of conflict management. The researchers found that a passive approach to conflict management amplifies employee strain, compared to an active style of conflict management.

WHY TO TRY IT

The point of resolving conflict is to repair relationships and reduce negative feelings—which doesn't happen when we ignore problems or strive to prove others wrong. Instead, active, collaborative approaches that allow everyone to be heard can help ensure that conflicts don't work against our happiness at work. The act of walking side by side with someone mirrors this process: When we compromise and adjust to each other, we can keep moving forward in sync.

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

