



Heard it through the Grapevine

A few years into my first full-time job, after taking on a new leadership role, I realized I was in over my head. Although I wanted to prove to my supervisor that I could handle more responsibility and bring value to our organization, I did not possess the necessary skills to complete this particular project. Instead of offering help or advice, a coworker of mine started telling those around him that the project was going to fail. This gossip eventually came to my supervisor. Again, instead of offering help or advice, she sent me a long email after work hours wanting clarification on how this project was going. All of these actions brought about damaging conflict that negatively affected our workplace culture. In the midst of conflict, there are specific strategies leaders can utilize in order to manage stress and grow.

In a study at UC Berkely, researchers found that conflict can help deepen a relationship when couples believed that they understood each other's point of view (Higgins, 74). With most confrontation, individuals are going to take opposing sides, and both opponents are going to think that they are correct. Because of this, if each person can take a minute to understand why the other person feels the way they do, it can go a long way in bringing about a positive result. We have all heard the phrase, "You can't understand someone until you walk a mile in their shoes." This is possibly an overused quote, but the point is simple: instead of bringing harsh judgement, offer understanding. Conflict will be beneficial if those involved seek ways to respect each other's perspectives while aligning their common interests.

Words are powerful, and the meaning behind them can be communicated more effectively through face-to-face interactions. UCLA researchers found that words in an e-mail or text alone account for only 7 percent of the information in communication (75). Meaning, communicating only through these forms of technology has the potential for confusion and conflict. Body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice are left out of e-mail and text messages, but they bring more clarity and even empathy to interaction. What usually happens when communicating via e-mail or texts is that the recipient attaches a tone or meaning based on your relationship with them, which may not be the same meaning as you intended. This can ultimately lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and hurt feelings. If you are interested in learning more about the importance of body language, sign up to take our Learning and Leadership Development class called [Body Language and Non-verbal Communications](#).

Finally, when approaching conflict, it is helpful to view that experience as a learning opportunity. The goal of any conflict should be to better each person involved (77). In order to reach this goal, one must have the correct intentions. Conflict has the tendency to escalate emotions to a point where each person simply wants to be right. They want their truth to be the only truth. On the flip side, if each person approaches conflict with humility and a desire to continuously learn, there is room for better solutions and innovation to spark. If you would like to learn about how to foster open dialogue around emotional topics, consider taking our Learning and Leadership Development class called Crucial Conversations.

Thinking back to the story in the introduction of this Quick Tip, the moral of the story is that each one of us were in the wrong. I should have reached out to my supervisor early in the process as well as my coworker for direction and support. However, I did not appreciate my coworker meddling in my work behind my back and would have liked for my supervisor to face this conflict head on through a face-to-face intervention. Stories like this are not uncommon in a workplace full of people with differing

opinions, ideas, and goals. Those differences are valuable and needed for success, but conflict can often arise out of these differences. Rather than letting conflict negatively impact a team, it is important to understand differing perspectives, seek face-to-face interactions, and approach every disagreement as a learning opportunity.

-Josh

Higgins, Jessica. *10 Skills for Effective Business Communication: Practical Strategies from the World's Greatest Leaders*. Tycho Press, 2018, pp. 74-78.