

Handling Disagreements in the Workplace

When we're faced with conflicts and misunderstandings in the workplace, often rising blood pressure, sleepless nights, and a short fuse tell us how strongly we are being affected by this lack of harmony. We don't have the choice to not encounter conflicts, they are inevitable. However, we can choose how to handle them. Anger, defensiveness, making a case for our position, condemning the other and pretending we're not aware of the conflict, are some of the tactics we often opt for. These approaches commonly result in adversarial relationships where ill will simmers and productivity drops.

Compassionate Communication proposes that, instead, we create a quality of connection that ensures all stakeholders that they and their needs matter and are being taken into account.

With practice, the skills of Compassionate Communication will facilitate trusting relationships and interactions that allow us to operate effectively and remain congruent with our values. Conflicts become occasions that lead to understanding. Collaborative relationships increase harmony and efficiency in the workplace.

To achieve this level of skillful speaking and listening we use these tools.

- We make clear and accurate observations free of judgments.
- We notice what feelings we may be experiencing and imagine the feelings of others.
- We identify and express the needs that are connected to the feelings, those universal values that motivate our actions.
- We make clear, do-able, positive, demand-free requests.

The Language of Compassionate Communication:

We've learned to use words that actually create tension and more conflict even when we're trying to resolve a problem or get a job done. Terms like "inappropriate," or "wrong," will elicit defensiveness or hostility. Statements that make demands stimulate resistance. Threats of punishment will do all three in addition to triggering alienation. Using any of these strategies to motivate people ends up eroding goodwill.

So what's left to do when we see our efforts to get the job done thwarted or when we don't like the way a colleague treats us? Fortunately, there are several options to access.

First, we pause. We choose how we want to respond. Once we've set an intention to deal with the situation without causing more discord, we can see it as an opportunity to create understanding and to practice our skills.

We use our tools to listen with curiosity and express respect for the other person's needs, even if we don't agree and don't expect to be able or willing to meet them.

When it's our turn, we express our own needs honestly and make a request for feedback or for a specific action that might meet our needs.

In this way we build partnership and buy-in instead of distrust and resentment. The time we invest in empathic exchanges will pay off in greater collaboration and higher productivity. Needless to say, our health and happiness will increase as conflict in the workplace diminishes.

The first step is the most important and the easiest. Set the intention.

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Further information available at www.cnvc.org website for The Center for Nonviolent Communication.

www.thedanceofcommunication website for The Dance of Communication.