

6 tips to resolve workplace conflict

Sharing our experience on
National Conflict Resolution Day
to help employers resolve conflict
effectively & with compassion.



Download free today



AN EMPLOYERS GUIDE

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WHO ARE PRIMED?

We provide businesses nationwide with HR & Health & Safety advice, resources & personal support.

Our aim is to inspire confident decision making when it comes to managing people, health & safety & workplace compliance.

We help businesses:

- ✓ **Comply** with UK employment law & health & safety legislation
- ✓ **Respond** to challenges relating to your people & their safety
- ✓ **Improve** your ability to manage people & workplace compliance effectively

Why resolving conflict is important

National Conflict Resolution Day this year is on 19 October 2023 and resolving conflict at work is a topic close to our hearts.

Disagreements at work are inevitable; we all have our own opinions, experiences and personalities to contend with and given how much time we spend together at work, we're not going to get along all the time.

But when disputes and disagreements arise, the key to resolving conflict is by identifying it early and managing it with compassion.

Whilst the odd argument here and there is nothing to worry about, letting it get out of hand is bad for everyone.

No one wants to come to work where tensions are high or they don't get along with their colleagues. And for employers, resolving conflict takes up valuable time and can be expensive.

Let's look at some key stats around conflict at work:

1 in 3

workers have experienced conflict at work.

CIPD 2020

+£1,000

The average cost per employee to resolve conflict.

REWAGE 2023

39%

of people reported dealing with conflict often, very often, a 10% rise since 2008.

Myers-Briggs 2022

£120m

total cost of informal discussions triggered by conflict each year

Saundry and Urwin (2021)

60%

of workers who experience conflict report suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result

REWAGE 2023

2/3

who resign as a result of being involved in conflict, do so without first discussing it with their line manager

REWAGE 2023

9%

of employees take time off work due to stress, anxiety and depression linked to conflict

REWAGE 2023

Supporting organisations to resolve conflict at work is our bread and butter – whether it's resolving issues between employers and employees or advising managers experiencing conflict between employees, we've seen it all before.

In this whitepaper, we're passing on advice from our experiences to help you avoid and resolve conflict in the workplace effectively and with compassion.

Be proactive: build relationships

Like many things, prevention is often better than cure! But what does that mean when it comes to preventing conflict in the first place?

The cornerstone to proactive conflict management centres around building relationships and acknowledging people's individual perspectives.



66%

of managers say they are often uncomfortable communicating with employees

INTERACT, HARRIS POLL



30%

of employees believe their manager lacks team building skills

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT 2019

Get to know your team

Get to know your team better and on an individual level. The better you know your people, the easier it is to spot conflict in the first instance.

Don't underestimate the power of one-to-one's

1-2-1 meetings give you a unique opportunity to get to know your team on a more personal level so you can better understand the external and internal pressures facing them and foster a positive working relationship.

When employees trust you, they're more likely to be open and honest – perhaps they'll tell you outright challenges they're facing with colleagues which can help you resolve and even avoid conflict from the start.

Resolve early & informally

Addressing conflict early benefits everyone. A recent report by Myers-Briggs found that managers spend on average 4 hours per week dealing with conflict, whilst those experiencing conflict in the workplace take more sick days and are less motivated and engaged whilst they're at work.



Recognise tension

We all respond differently to conflict – some people may be very outspoken and show annoyance openly at the point of conflict, whilst others are more tolerant, keeping frustrations to themselves and progressively get more annoyed over time until they can't take it anymore.

If you know your team well, you'll be more attuned to rising tension and can deal with situations early before they simmer on for too long.

Many disputes often start with something minor. On the surface you might think they've been resolved but tensions can simmer away and build up over time until the situation is brought to a head, which isn't pretty for anyone.

Identify the root cause

When you understand what causes conflict between your team, the easier it is to put steps in place to prevent or resolve it.

Unfortunately, humans and relationships are complex which can make it difficult to understand why conflict arises in the first place.

When you can identify the root cause, you can begin putting steps in place to resolve the challenges. More serious reasons should be dealt with under [a formal procedure](#).

In our experience, some of the most common reasons for conflict are:

- a clash of personalities
- differing styles of working
- not valuing other people's views or ideas
- rudeness and disrespect towards each other

Some more serious reasons are:

- consistent under performance
- bullying and/or harassment
- any kind of discriminatory behaviour

Get good at listening... and having difficult conversations

Listen to listen

We often listen to respond, but often when dealing with conflict, we need to take a step back and listen to understand.

Listening to understand helps us grasp viewpoints, rather than focusing on formulating a reply. It's not an easy skill to master but with practice it's a key skill for any manager.



Set clear expectations regarding behaviour

Setting clear expectations around behaviour is key – let people know what behaviour will and will not be tolerated and call out behaviour that is unacceptable straight away.

Ignoring bad behaviour can lead to a culture where bullying occurs and cliques form. When you're clear about behaviour and expected standards, the easier it is to highlight when conduct is unacceptable.

Don't put off difficult conversations

Don't put a conversation off because you think it will be difficult. Avoiding difficult conversations can undermine your authority and actually contribute to conflict, particularly if it's regarding unacceptable behaviour.

Letting conflict go unchecked can lead to more problems and contribute towards team unhappiness. If you reach the stage where you need to take more formal action, relationships can be damaged beyond repair making it much harder to resolve conflict successfully.

Remember to remain neutral

When it comes to managing people, think Switzerland, because remaining neutral is a key skill. You're a role model to others in your organisation so it's important to remain professional, distance yourself from office gossip and demonstrate the behaviours you'd wish to see from others.

43% of employees believe managers treat some team members more favourably than others, so when it comes to resolving conflict, remaining neutral is key.

A photograph of a woman with brown hair and glasses, wearing a denim shirt, looking down and resting her chin on her hand in a thoughtful pose. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office space.

Reflect on your own management skills

A recent study found that managers can be a key source of conflict at work.

If you don't believe us, then some of these statistics may open your eyes:

32%

of employees who had experienced conflict at work said their manager had made the situation worse

CIPD 2020

1 in 5

employees say their manager would hold a mistake against them

CIPD 2020

1 in 5

employees say that it's their manager who causes conflict in their team

CIPD 2020

Managing people isn't always smooth sailing and it can be big responsibility on top of your everyday role, especially if you've never had any training and you have difficult personality types in your team.

If you reflect on your management style and skills, do you treat team members differently? Do you have all the necessary skills you need to manage people and resolve conflict confidently?

Seek advice early

Don't be afraid to seek external advice early on.

As we mentioned, prevention is often better than cure. Whether you have an internal HR team or not, seeking advice from an external HR advisor who is in a neutral position, not knowing the parties involved can really help managers work through conflict early on.

Chances are, they've seen it all before and can hopefully help you take early steps using tried and tested methods to avoid having to take a more formal approach. And if you do need to take a formal approach, an external HR advisor will already know the background and personalities involved to help you reach your desired outcome.



£950 Is the average cost in management time of a formal grievance per employee
WERS

18 days Is the estimated time management spend on disciplinary cases
ACAS 2019

Use formal procedures as a last resort

Despite everyone's best efforts, sometimes there may be no other choice but to resolve conflict using a more formal method.

If you continuously see unwanted behaviour or under performance from an employee, you may need to use a formal disciplinary procedure.

If an employee makes a complaint or wants behaviour to be investigated formally, they have the right to raise a grievance which needs to be dealt with seriously and in-line with your grievance policy.

One of the most important skills a manager can learn is to recognise the turning point at which informal approaches are not working and when the time is right to move onto a formal procedure.

Solutions to support your people strategy

We empower business owners and their teams to manage their people and Health & Safety compliance with confidence.

We can act as your HR or team or work alongside your existing HR team to help you comply with the basics, respond to challenges that arise and improve your management skills in the process.

Included in Primed

- ✓ Unlimited **employment & HR advice** over the phone & via email
- ✓ A template **employment contract**
- ✓ Employment contract & **policy review**
- ✓ HR Handbook and **essential HR policies**
- ✓ **Grievance & disciplinary advice** & supporting template documents
- ✓ **Conduct & performance management advice** & supporting template documents
- ✓ Support **managing absences**
- ✓ Wide range of **HR templates & documents** in our online system

Manager Training

Set your managers up for success with our management development programmes.

Aimed at new and established managers, we offer a range of training modules to give managers essential skills.

Ask us for more information.

Speak to an expert

If you'd like to arrange a **call-back** at a time that suits you, please visit primed.co.uk/speak-to-an-expert

Alternatively, you can call us on 01622 47 41 49

Send us an email at info@primed.co.uk

Find out more
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