

A TOOL KIT FOR MANAGING A CONFLICT WITH YOUR BOSS

GETTING READY	The following are some suggestions and guidelines for getting that important meeting with your boss then getting yourself ready for it.	
<p>Know who/what you are dealing with</p> <p>The person The organization</p> <p>Attempt dialogue rather than isolating from or fighting with the other side</p> <p>Open lines of communication and keep them open</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to know and understand your boss • Acknowledge the limitations and constraints of the manager's role • Separate the person from the issues – you may not change the person but you may get some resolution of the issues • Get the boss to take notice of you – tie them down to a meeting rather than a vague promise of one 	<p>Know your boss So you are interacting with the real person and not through your fears, preconceptions, prejudices and stereotypes.</p> <p>Acknowledge limitations Assumptions, expectations, policies and resources affect what attitude the boss takes – or what decisions he or she has the ability (including authority) to make. You may be better able to understand his or her behaviour, get some idea of his or her limitations, shortcomings, and expectations, be more aware of where he or her may be coming from – and going to</p>
<p>Define Your Issues</p> <p>Be focused Be realistic Be objective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on what you believe you can achieve or change – if you can get a hearing, understanding, movement on one issue, then you and your boss will feel more positive and the way may be clear to address other issues • Be clear what you want to change • Chose the issues you want to deal with carefully • Be specific so others know exactly what is required of them • Hasten slowly 	<p>What are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Interests • Your Needs • Your objective(s) <p>Make a list of these</p> <p>Have some constructive and realistic suggestions ready for meeting these. List them too.</p> <p>Hasten slowly Attempt to solve several problems at once and you may end up with nothing!</p>
THE MEETING	The following are guidelines and suggestions for getting through that meeting They do not follow a particular order - that depends on the flow of the meeting itself. Also, there may appear to be repetition - but that is because many items can be found in several compartments of the tool-kit.	
<p>Manage Your feelings</p> <p>Be calm Be confident</p> <p>Conflict can be stressful and when feelings are involved, emotions can get the best of us.</p> <p>Try not to become emotional</p> <p>And do not be provoked!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are in a situation where you are likely to be overwhelmed by fear, anger or despair, do not let your feelings or those of others take you over. • By listening actively, you can maintain your own balanced emotional level, and by affirming the other, you can make him/her feel more comfortable too. • Avoid intransigent and stubborn positions • Avoid being hooked by others' non-assertive behaviour. 	<p>When some else is provocative, dismissive, disruptive, manipulative, or non-assertive in other ways, they are sending out signals which can hook us into a cycle where we behave in a similar way.</p> <p>Ultimately, no one gets what they want in these cycles.</p>

<p>Saying what you want</p> <p>Be realistic Be focused Be objective Be confident</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on what you believe you can achieve or change • Be clear what you want to change • Chose the issues you want to deal with carefully • Be specific so others know exactly what is required of them • Use questions to check that you are being heard and understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid vague adjectives and adverbs, which only serve to confuse the listener or give the other a chance to delay or obfuscate • Again, don't exaggerate or over-dramatise • Chose language that will not make the situation worse, ie value laden words like 'failed', ultimatums, and negative criticism and blame
<p>Active Listening</p> <p>Hearing as well as listening</p> <p>Be cool Be calm Be focussed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to ensure that you understand clearly what is being said • Make it clear that your are listening and are attentive to what is being said to you • Be aware of your body language – show interest and attentiveness • Be aware of the other's body language. • Is he or she actually listening, paying attention to what you say? • You must try to keep your boss' attention • Use the power of silence • Pause, listen, think before you respond. 	<p>Body Language</p> <p>Your Own Show interest and attentiveness Look as relaxed and comfortable As possible (although this may be difficult in a stressful situation – do your best)</p> <p>Your Boss Is he or she uncomfortable? Fidgets? Makes sudden or nervous movements?</p> <p>Keeping your boss' attention Encourage him or her to listen, stick to the subject, encourage him or her to concentrate on the matter to hand.</p> <p>Gather information Listening, understanding, asking questions, encouraging the other to speak whilst you listen.</p>
<p>Behave assertively</p> <p>Making feelings clear and communicating what you want</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing your strengths and weaknesses • Choosing to manage your feelings and those of others • Avoiding being hooked by other's non-assertive behaviour • People will understand clearly what you want • They will not feel pressured or browbeaten • They will respect you • You will keep your self-respect • Your relationships will survive disagreement • You may however risk your request being refused • You may also risk confrontation with other people 	<p>Assertive responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I-you</i> messages rather than <i>I-I</i> and <i>you-you</i> messages – finger-pointing... • Communicate clearly without blaming others and shifting responsibility • Don't exaggerate or over-dramatise • Give examples • Tactfully refer to previous incidents or agreements

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<p>Being Objective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay centred • Stay focused on your goals • Recognise the other person's tactics • Be aware of your emotional reactions • Be aware of the other person's emotional reactions • Avoid stubborn positions • Be creative • Don't be provoked • Stop before you speak • Tap the power of silence 	<p>Staying Centred Do not polarise in feelings, in actions, or in basic positions</p> <p>Being Creative Do not negativise Be open to a third, centred perspective Propose possible solutions Stay calm; tolerate ambivalence</p>
<p>Taking Their Side</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively listen • Paraphrase/reflect • Express your thoughts/viewpoint in a non-provocative manner • Use open questions • Show concern • Acknowledge their feelings • Acknowledge their viewpoint • Agree where possible • Apologise if necessary/where warranted (a sign of strength and confidence) • Project confidence • Be inclusive and collaborative • Bridge differences where you can 	<p>Being Inclusive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of "we's", few "I's". • Use "I" to express your feelings, and "We" to indicate common purpose • Thank him or her for his or her comments and for their support. • "We are all in this together, so let us help each other..." • Invite contributions: "What do you think?"; "I value your opinion"; "What would you find helpful in this situation?"; "What do you think is the best way forward from here?"
<p>Influencing Up</p> <p>Not just another word for <i>crawling</i></p> <p>Be polite Be confident Be yourself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep it simple, genuine, warm - but also judge what suits the situation and the person you are addressing. • Acknowledging and affirming to check that both of you understand what is being said, and to demonstrate a balancing of mutual needs • Show an interest in the person – basic human interaction, responding to the managers as they are whilst also acknowledging what they represent (ie respect for their authority and status) • Make it hard for them to say no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hellos, goodbyes and thankyou's</i> communicate respect, openness and a willingness to be positive • Positive body language and tone – avoid aggressive or agitated movements, sudden gestures or movements, sudden changes in voice tone and volume. • So get comfortable physically, breathe slowly, use listening spaces to stay calm, and • Listen actively – do not make assumptions or interpret – this is likely to make you less relaxed.

More stuff for **your** tool kit....

This is of a general nature and can be applied when you are dealing with difficult situations or difficult people...

1. Communication...Saying and Meaning... Hearing and Understanding ...and Active Listening.

- ❑ Communication works. Keep people informed and up to date. Bring them into the picture.
- ❑ Its is not what you say, but how you say it.
- ❑ Language can provoke conflict. It can also encourage its resolution.
- ❑ Effective communication: what is meant is said, and what is said is meant; what is said is heard, and what is meant is understood.
 - The message that is sent may not be the one that was intended.
 - The sender may distort the message, either consciously or subconsciously.
 - The message may not be clear. It may be vague, and it will be distorted.
 - The receiver may receive the message, but not the message intended.
 - Resulting conflict may appear to the receiver to have been provoked by the sender.
 - The receiver's assumptions, perceptions, expectations, and projections may distort the message.
- ❑ Saying and meaning, hearing and understanding are effected and distorted by a number of factors, both external and internal to the participants. Noise, interruptions, the presence of others...fear of conflict., eagerness to engage in conflict, anxiety to avoid conflict...all can ensure that messages sent and received are distorted or incomplete.
- ❑ Active listening: ensuring that the message received is the message intended to be sent, that what is said is what is meant, and that what is meant is understood.
- ❑ To be effective, communication should involve motivation to communicate, effective disclosure, clear, precise messages, assertiveness, clarity of thought and language, empathy, effective listening, and an appropriate environment. (p29)
- ❑ Clearly communicate and clearly understand communication.
- ❑ Identify the goal of the communication.
- ❑ Identify the key message(s)
- ❑ Set practical and attainable goals.
- ❑ Avoid complex messages.
- ❑ Break it down into smaller pieces if necessary.
- ❑ Reflect how the receiver of the message may feel – that is, be empathic. Put yourself in their shoes.
- ❑ Watch out for barriers to communication and barriers to meaning
 - noise
 - distractions
 - listeners/observers
 - interruptions
 - physical discomfort

- ❑ Verbal and non-verbal communications that prevent their listener's understanding of what is meant: criticising, name-calling, ordering, threatening, moralising, avoiding, and diverting.
- ❑ Consider what a person does not wish to communicate, and how this person might be motivated to do so.

2. Some Standard Tactics You Can Use For Dealing With Difficult People

- ❑ Firstly, **Get the facts right**. ascertain discretely what is really happening - separate the truth from the gossip and the judgmental stuff.
- ❑ Effective managers listen far more than they talk. And they observe.
- ❑ Put on your radar.
- ❑ It takes two to tangle.
- ❑ Tit-for-tat response is a recipe for stalemate.
- ❑ People derive genuine satisfaction from voicing their feelings and resentments.
- ❑ They need to know that you have heard what they have said. So reflect back what you hear.
- ❑ One of the most powerful and surprising ways to acknowledge the other side's point is to pre-empt it.
- ❑ Acknowledge their feelings.
- ❑ Recognize their motivations e.g.. feelings of insecurity, need to prove themselves, ambition.
- ❑ Warn, don't threaten.
- ❑ If things get hot, take time out...let things cool down.
- ❑ Ways of Saying Things:
 - Don't say either/or, say both/and
 - Don't say "but", say "yes...and"
 - Say "I" not "you"
 - Ask: "why not?"
 - Ask "What if?"
 - Ask for their advice
 - Ask "What makes that fair?"
 - Ask open-ended questions: "how", "why", "why not", "What", "who". Not "is", "isn't", "can" or "can't".
 - Ask reality-testing questions. "What do *you* think will happen if we don't agree?" "What do *you* think *I* should do?" "What do you think *we* will do?" "What will *you* do?"
 - Reframe from "you" and "me" to "we".
- ❑ Remember, difficult people are not just the recalcitrant ones. There are also those who do not wish to be involved, whether through shyness, nervousness, or indifference, and nevertheless have to be brought into the project.

3. What if they won't play?

- ❑ Focus attention on the need for a solution, on the merits: "We can't go on like this".
- ❑ Focus attention on a wider, shared interest or goal. "This affects all of us".

- ❑ Don't criticise their position. It will only make them dig in.
- ❑ If you push too hard, they will tend to push back to defend themselves.
- ❑ Rejecting their position locks *them* in. Defending yours locks *you* in.
- ❑ Do not push back. When they assert their position, don't reject them. When they attack your ideas, don't defend them. When they attack, don't counterattack. Don't react. Sidestep the attack and deflect it against the problem.
- ❑ Don't attack their position: look behind it. Treat their position as an option. Objectively examine how it will meet your joint interests. "I see what you mean, *however...*"
- ❑ Don't defend your ideas: invite criticism and advice. "How would you do *it*?" "What do you think?"
- ❑ Recast an attack on you as an attack on the problem. Listen to them. Let *them* let off steam, express their concerns. Show you understand what they are saying. Then, "what can we do to solve this?"
- ❑ Ask questions and pause.
- ❑ Statements generate resistance whereas questions generate answers. They offer no target to strike at, no position to attack. They do not criticise, they educate. They allow the other side to get their points across and let you understand them.
- ❑ So, don't just give the right answer, ask the right question.
- ❑ When you ask questions, pause. Don't let them off the hook by going right on with another question or some comment of your own.
- ❑ Some useful phrases...
 - "Please correct me if I am wrong, but..."
 - "Have I got this right?"
 - "Let me see if I understand what you are saying?"
 - "One fair solution might be..."
 - "I appreciate what you are trying to say..."
 - "I have a problem I would like you to help me solve"

4. Dealing with Tricks

- ❑ Basic Rules: Separate the people from the problem. Focus on interests not positions.
- ❑ Recognize the tactic. Neutralise it by naming it.
- ❑ Don't play their game. Name the game. Know your hot buttons, know theirs.
- ❑ Expose tricks...ask clarifying questions. Make a reasonable request...ask questions to which you already know the answers.
- ❑ Change the game.
- ❑ If stonewalled, test it, go around it, or just ignore it.
- ❑ Restraint: Calm, calm. Buy time.

5. Some common Tricky Tactics

- ❑ **Deliberate deception.** Misrepresentation of the facts, e.g.. Phoney facts, dubious intentions. Unless you have good reason to trust somebody, don't. But less than full disclosure is not the same as deception. Ask clarifying questions. Ask questions to which you already know the answer.
- ❑ **Psychological warfare:**
 - **Recognize the tactic.** This will help nullify its effect. Bringing it up explicitly will probably prevent a recurrence. **Name the game.** e.g. power plays, stubbornness, obstruction. Suggest a short break whilst you consider whether or not you want to go on with the negotiation. Insist on principle.
 - **Personal attacks:** always puts you on the defensive if it gets to you. This can be a comment on your appearance, your politics, your status. It can be making you wait, or interrupting you whilst you are speaking. They can deliberately refuse to make eye contact. They can imply that you are ignorant. They can refuse to listen to you and make you repeat yourself. Again, recognize the tactic. This will help nullify its effect. Bringing it up explicitly will probably prevent a recurrence. Neutralise the attack.
 - **Threats.** Easy to make. Much easier than an offer. Can lead to escalation. *Warnings* are much more legitimate than threats and are not vulnerable to counter-threats. And you don't have to carry them out. For threats to be effective, they must be credibly communicated. You can interfere with the communication process. You can ignore threats. You can take them as unauthorised, spoken in haste, or simply irrelevant. You can also make it risky to communicate them or turn them to your advantage.
 - **Refusal to negotiate.** Recognize it. Talk about it. Don't attack the refusal but find out why. Suggest options. Ask the right questions.
 - **Lock-in Tactics.** Resist on principle: "I never yield to pressure, only to reason". Avoid making their commitment a central question. De-emphasise it so that the other side can more gracefully back down.
 - **Don't be a victim.** Be prepared to fight dirty or unreasonable tactics. Be just as firm as they can, only firmer.
 - **Don't corner.** Leave an exit open.

6. Defence Mechanisms

Generally unconscious ways of dealing with unpleasant situations. Recognize them.

- ❑ **Denial:** essentially covering up. Occasional direct confrontation may be necessary to counter denial.
- ❑ **Repression:** hiding or putting the lid on unpleasant issues or solutions.
- ❑ **Projection:** placing responsibility or blame for an unpleasant situation or conflict on someone or something else. Can be victim talk; can lead to conspiracy theories and even paranoia.
- ❑ **Diversion:** changing the subject to avoid the threatening topic. May even mean a change of approach: turning the attack on the person raising the undesired subject.
- ❑ **Displacement:** suppressed anger directed at the wrong person. This often occurs when the real problem is a person whose power and status is such that the individual feels helpless to deal directly with them. Initiating strong conflict with a co-worker may be a means of displacing a conflict against an employer. It can work the other way by scapegoating or white-anting an individual whose management perceived to be a troublemaker.

- ❑ **Rationalisation:** making excuses which are less pleasant than the real reason for what has been done or said. Often difficult to deal with since it has the appearance of being reasonable, factual, and satisfactory. This mechanism is especially adopted by highly articulate and assertive people and tends to overwhelm the inarticulate or non-assertive, or those with poor self-esteem.
- ❑ **Intellectualisation:** similar, with highly educated and articulate people. This can have a negative effect on the less articulate and less assertive. "Let's talk about this rationally and intelligently, and not let our emotions get on the way..." A defense mechanism to avoid feelings and emotions.
- ❑ **Fixation:** refusal to move on from a particular point, often for fear of the future, the unpredictable.
- ❑ **Minimisation:** may be effective in persuading the other party that they are being unreasonable or silly in seeking to pursue something which is not worth the trouble.
- ❑
- ❑ **Hostility:** when an individual becomes angry, aggressive or argumentative. It tends to encourage others to avoid the issue or often to avoid discussion of any potentially sensitive issues with the person. Hostility is a barrier defending the individual from what he sees as a hostile world. The person who responds with hostility may also claim that the issue is one which affects their personal integrity, competence, honour and what not, a personal attack. This diverts the issue from being e.g. a question of management or workplace practice, to being an attack on the integrity or competence of the manager.
- ❑ **Conversion and fantasy:** avoidance of unpleasant reality. If it persists for a long time, the individual loses the ability to distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality.
- ❑ **Identification**
- ❑ **Regression:** returning to childhood behaviour...tantrums, exaggerated tears, refusing to speak.
- ❑ **Flight:** can lead to walkouts, although walkouts are also often a conscious power game.
- ❑ **Resignation and Apathy:** a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness, and hopelessness leading to apathy and submission. Nothing is worth trying since nothing will work. Unless self-esteem and a sense of personal power can be developed, resignation and apathy will prevail.

7. Cooperative Solutions

- ❑ Understand the message as the other side hears it.
- ❑ Consider the other side's choice. What is the primary decision those on the other side see themselves as facing?
- ❑ How you see the world depends on where you sit. People tend to see what they want to see.
- ❑ Don't deduce their intentions from your fears or suspicions. **It is all too easy to fall into the habit of putting the worst interpretation on what the other side says or does.**
- ❑ Why are they angry, obstructive, or whatever? Are they responding to past pressures or grievances? Looking for revenge or payback? Compensating for insecurity or positioning for self-advancement?
- ❑ Without communication, there is no negotiation.
- ❑ If you are not hearing what the other side is saying, there is no communication.
- ❑ Take in their perceptions, their needs, and their constraints.
- ❑ Face the problem, not the people. Deal with the people as human beings and with the problem on its merits.

- ❑ For a wise solution, reconcile interests not positions. The basic problem lies not in conflicting positions but in the conflict between each side's needs, desires, concerns, and fears.
- ❑ Look behind positions for interests.
- ❑ Don't focus on past grievances, focus on future concerns.
- ❑ Look forwards, not back.
- ❑ Talk about how you would like to go rather than where you have come from.
- ❑ Make their decision easy.
- ❑ If you want a horse to jump a fence, don't raise the fence.
- ❑ Step to their side. Respect breeds respect.
- ❑ Don't teach them yourself; let the problem be the teacher.
- ❑ Don't treat the other side's position as an obstacle; treat it as an opportunity.
- ❑ Move from positional bargaining to joint problem solving.
- ❑ Actively involving them in devising a solution so that it becomes their idea, not just yours. It means satisfying their un-met interests. It means helping them to save face; and it means making the process of negotiation as easy as possible. It means building a bridge from their thinking back to yours.
- ❑ Give credit where is it due. Thank your team for their cooperation and their contribution to the joint project.

7. And finally...

- ❑ **Go slow to go fast...don't hurry.**
- ❑ **Make the process easy.** Step by step. Break it down to smaller parts.
- ❑ Move progressively from the easiest to the more difficult issues. Identify the expanding areas of agreement and the shrinking areas of disagreement.
- ❑ **Create a sense of momentum**, of progress, showing that agreement *is* possible.