

MDS Alert

Staffing: Add These Three Conflict Resolution Skills to Your Workplace Toolbox

Hint: Aim for a mix of empathy and lack of judgment.

Avoiding conflict may be your go-to maneuver, especially if you feel like you just don't have the bandwidth to deal with other people's issues. But if you're a manager or are otherwise invested in having a cohesive team, conflict resolution is a skill you need to hone.

Employees will feel better about coming to work if they know any issues they may face will be acknowledged and treated with respect, says **MariaRita Genovese, CPC**, director of operations at the Department of Medical Oncology and Jefferson Infusion Centers at Thomas Jefferson University, in a presentation for AAPC's HEALTHCON 2022.



Honor Everyone's Voice

One of the most important ways to help employees feel respected in the workplace is acknowledging and honoring each employee's voice.

"Every employee has a voice, and it's really important that people understand that," Genovese said.

One of the best strategies to make sure you're able to access everyone's voice, as a manager, is to engage employees during "rounds." If you're a manager, consider borrowing the practice of clinicians' habitual checks on patients by having a formally scheduled meeting with each person on your team. Although the scheduling may be formal, the interaction doesn't have to be. Scheduling 10-20 minutes for a coffee or a face-to-face sit down or a phone call, if remote, is an important way to make sure you know what's going on with employees.

Rounding with team members is an important way of knowing what kind of support employees may need and being able to help them before any developing situations start to spiral.

"Rounding is so important because you need to know what's going on at all times," Genovese said. As a manager, you need to know what they're seeing, whether they need help. It's critical to employee engagement."

If employees need support, like flexibility to care for a sick child or even just an ear to listen to how hard something feels, this is where you utilize leveraging any resources you may be able to tap into.

Making sure employees feel heard is also crucial to cultivating a healthy, happy workplace. Employees may love what they do but feel discouraged or dismissed or even dread coming to work if the culture isn't inclusive or doesn't acknowledge that conflicts of all sorts inevitably arise and require resolution.

Meet Conflict Head On

During the conference session, many attendees divulged that they were in managerial positions and felt overwhelmed whenever they had interpersonal conflicts developing or festering within their teams.

You have to acknowledge conflicts, Genovese said. Otherwise, team members will feel like their voices aren't heard, their experiences don't matter, and that the workplace isn't welcoming.

There are myriad benefits to becoming more involved in resolving conflict. Being an active listener, confronting conflict head on, and helping folks find resolution leads to more trust and reduces stress at work. Increased conflict resolution can result in more employee satisfaction. Of course, managers want employees to be happy, because then they're motivated, and their productivity goes way up, Genovese said.



Be Self Aware

Seeing the conference session attendees divulge their concerns about their approaches to conflict showed a major upside: These folks, in management positions, were self-aware of their own feelings, as well as how they could grow as managers.

Every individual, including managers, has their own communication style, and it may or may not jive with the rest of the people on a team.

As a manager, it's your responsibility to figure out how your team members prefer to communicate. For example, while one person may appreciate the straightforwardness of a "hey, do you have a minute?" sit-down meeting to check in, another may become extremely anxious to have a meeting with a boss with no warning. Or, if you're checking in on how someone's doing after the loss of a resident, one person might appreciate a cup of coffee and a doughnut and 10 minutes to speak their mind, while another may appreciate the use of a quiet room with a door and a few minutes to decompress.

Regardless of how you prefer to deliver news or conduct conversations, it's important to be aware of your body language and to read others' as well. If an employee has set up a meeting with you to discuss a concern, and you're sitting behind your desk with your arms crossed, the employee may not feel like the space or moment are safe for expressing confidences. Similarly, if you tend to wear your emotions on your sleeve - or you have a "glass face" - employees may feel judged if you let your personal opinion of a situation or comment constitute your initial response, even if it's "just" through body language.