

Conflict Avoidance Hurts Business, Employees

Some time ago I learned a valuable lesson about conflict at work. I realized I have the power to make choices when conflict arises. I can choose to resolve or avoid, and if I choose to avoid there can be real costs to me and my organization.

Conflict happens! When people work together it does occur. Unfortunately, many of us find it very difficult to face conflict. While Conflict Avoidance may seem the easier choice, I've seen many consequences in the long term. So, why do so many of us avoid resolving conflict?

- We are afraid others won't like us if we speak up.
- We fear the other person may say something worse about us.
- We wait until we're really angry and fear loss of our tempers.
- We tried it before and things escalated or nothing changed.
- We lack the skills and confidence needed to resolve conflict.

There are many costs of Conflict Avoidance. Biggest of all may be the cost to the organization. How often has someone come up to you and taken your valuable time to describe how frustrated they are with "Bill" or "Nancy" or how they wished he/she would change! When employees are having these chats, you can bet they aren't doing their work. Goals or profits may take a back seat to conflict.

Also, there is a much more "human" cost of Conflict Avoidance. It impacts morale and energy since employees get frustrated and angry. Also, employees tend to internalize what they hear over and over again. If back-biting becomes the work culture's steady diet, it can often ruin not only organization, but employee health! Conflict Avoidance clearly hinders collaboration and teamwork. Employees aren't as creative or willing to take risks or share new ideas. Some may also spend their time plotting how to "one up" the other. What started as a molehill can gain momentum and become overwhelming. So in the end, each of us loses.

How can we prevent paying the price of Conflict Avoidance and instead reap the benefits of healthy employees working together in a productive environment.

- Accept conflict as a part of organization life. When people work together, there can and often will be conflict. It's what you do with the conflict that determines the results.
- Prepare employees for conflict. Invest in training and practice sessions so employees will be ready and willing when it happens.

- Encourage employees to voice conflict and ask for help in resolving it. Conflict is often a key part of personal growth and development resulting in improved employee and organization performance.
- Use a structured approach and common language to address conflict. Make it easy for employees to succeed by giving them the right tools.

These steps can help each of us succeed through stronger work relationships and a greater focus on the business itself.

So the next time conflict arises between employees, are you equipped with the necessary skills and willingness to make the choice of Conflict Resolution?

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