



Content for Coaches and Consultants

Professionally Written Leadership Articles for Newsletters and Blogs

Dear Colleague,

The following article is a sample 1500-word article for leaders in organization to help them look at the issues that arise about managing conflicts, and suggestions for finding solutions.

It's typical of what you can find at ContentforCoaches.com, a library of leadership articles available for purchase, individually or as part of a subscription service, with reprint rights, i.e. you can change it, put your name to it, add your own personal stories, or use as is.

It's what could be called a "generic, ever-green, information-rich" article, and while such content is valuable for your readers, it could be made more effective by optimizing it for personal connection and for search engines. You want your online content to stimulate reader responses, particularly by clicking to your site and services.

In the second half of this document, I've revised the same article to show you how it can be personalized and optimized for search engines through hyperlinking to your own web pages. I've added the personal pronoun "I," speak in a more informal tone, and encourage reader interaction. The longer version article is broken up into four article nuggets, and can be used as blog posts, or short e-newsletter content.

Here at ContentforCoaches.com, I offer several versions of each leadership topic:

- 1. Long versions, 1500-2000 words, generic, ever-green, and information-rich*
- 2. Short versions, 750-950 words, condensing the same ideas in the longer article*
- 3. Article nuggets, 3-5 blog-ready sections of a topic, with personal pronouns and suggested keyword and website pages hyperlinks*

It is also possible to ask for exclusive content for your web pages, e-newsletters and blogs, and content strategy consulting with me, Dr. Patsi Krakoff.

I hope you get value from the following two article samples. Here's to your continued success, may your online content bring you results!

Patsi

Part One: Your Free Sample Leadership Article

Managing Conflict: Tough Conversations

*“When conflict is ignored—especially at the top—the result will be an enterprise that competes more passionately with itself than with its competitors.”— Howard M. Guttman, *When Goliaths Clash*, 2003*

Managers spend an inordinate amount of time putting out fires, particularly interpersonal ones. Some say at least 20 percent of their time is consumed by managing conflict. Productivity decreases even further when coworkers ruminate over arguments and disagreements.

As long as Western culture values democratic processes and individual freedom, some workplaces will encourage debate. This isn't a bad thing, as innovative ideas often spring from arguments and those who refuse to “go along just to get along.”

Conflict should be neither suppressed nor ignored within an organization. When it goes unnoticed, it will worsen and invite interpersonal stress. Eliminating conflict is not the answer, and companies that take this approach are doomed to fail.

Trend analysts predict workplace conflicts will rise because people face increased pressure to produce more and better with fewer resources. Job insecurity, a fluctuating economy, the stress of technological advancements, and an epidemic of outsourcing and downsizing are putting today's work force on edge.

There is a strong link between the ability to resolve conflict and one's perceived effectiveness as a leader. According to research from the Management Development Institute of Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, effective managers resolve conflicts by employing four key behaviors:

1. *Gaining perspective*
2. *Creating solutions*
3. *Expressing emotions*
4. *Reaching out*

Those managers who succeed at resolving conflicts are deemed more suitable for promotion. However, most managers are trained in the competencies required for their careers and industries. They aren't necessarily astute negotiators of people's emotions and relationships.

Managed well, conflict can stimulate creativity, motivate people to stretch themselves, encourage peer-to-peer learning and help teams move beyond the status quo. Your task, as a leader, is to facilitate tough conversations that help resolve most workplace conflicts.

Three Sources of Conflict

Three factors contribute to organizational conflicts:

1. Differences in behavior and communication styles
2. Differences in priorities and values
3. Workplace conditions, including *poor communications from leaders*

Some personalities just seem to clash. It's important to determine why two people rub each other the wrong way. Do they have opposing behavioral styles? For example, an extrovert who is open and expressive can view an introvert as hard to read and untrustworthy. Likewise, a time-conscious, highly organized employee may harshly judge a more spontaneous colleague.

Teaching team members to understand basic human differences can help them overcome their tendencies to judge and learn to accept coworkers' differences. Consider using any of the commonly accepted assessment tools, such as the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#) (MBTI), another personality inventory or 360-degree feedback.

Workshops provide another option. An extrovert can learn to ask questions to draw out an introvert. The highly organized team member can learn to set more realistic deadlines.

Understanding personality differences can help prevent clashes and conflicts before they become ongoing problems.

Expectations and Assumptions

People have different needs, values, beliefs, assumptions and cultural frameworks. Your expectations are fed by your past experiences. If you erroneously assume that others are essentially mirror images, your lack of perspective can contribute to strife.

Leaders and teams must explore others' expectations, assumptions, underlying values and priorities. This can be accomplished in group or individual sessions, led by a manager or coach. When there is an elevated degree of conflict, it's wise to retain a professional who is trained in interpersonal skills and mediation.

Behind every complaint is an underlying value that goes unsatisfied. Asking questions like "What's really important here?" often allows you to uncover competing values and priorities. You will facilitate more authentic conversations when you ask the right questions.

Communication Skills

There are three fundamental communication styles: nonassertive, assertive and aggressive. Each of us has a preference, and we're capable of switching to another, as appropriate.

We are sometimes unaware, however, of how others perceive us. You may think you're being appropriately assertive, but a more sensitive or resentful coworker may perceive you to be aggressive.

Add to the mix our personal agendas, and it's easy to see how communication breakdowns breed conflict.

Executive Sources of Conflict

Executives contribute to conflict by communicating ambiguously, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Most of us want to avoid conflict, but we can sometimes "talk out of both sides of our mouths" and give mixed messages. In optimal circumstances, issues may be resolved, but such communication fosters an organizational climate that discourages commitment (at best) and promotes conflicts (at worst).

When executives stand up and declare war on barriers to candor, they can welcome new ideas—but they may be saddled with old skills. Leaders must *ask the questions behind the questions* to foster honest communications and supply training opportunities.

Many executives are *sitting too close to the blackboard* to see their communication errors. An unbiased professional coach or consultant can spot weaknesses and help correct approaches that contribute to conflict.

Organizational Sources of Conflict

Several conditions make a workplace fertile ground for conflict:

1. If an organization has a **rigid hierarchical structure**, with an authoritarian leadership culture, expect incessant arguments and a robust rumor mill. In this type of environment, open communications are discouraged.
2. Is there a **poorly instituted reward/promotional system**, where unfair favoritism occurs or is perceived to occur?
3. When managers are forced to compete for **limited resources**, their agendas can prevent them from getting along with others. They become more concerned with their personal or departmental gains and forget about the organization's overall well-being.
4. **Change itself** can destabilize relations because people struggle when they're forced out of their comfort zones. Companies involved in mergers and/or acquisitions, for example, experience more conflict. Rapidly changing environments create a ripe atmosphere for stress, anxiety and conflict.

Four Ways to Cope with Conflict

When conflict occurs, you can choose to react in one of four different ways:

1. You can play the victim and act betrayed. You can complain to those who will listen and create alliances against the offending party. This rarely works in the business world, yet many workers actively engage in passive-aggressive behaviors instead of directly addressing conflict.
2. You can withdraw, either by physically removing yourself from the situation or emotionally and mentally disengaging. In worst cases, this may involve walking out of a heated meeting, moving to a new unit or team, or quitting your job. A Gallup Organization survey reports that, at any one time, as many as 19 percent of an organization's employees are *actively disengaged*. Worse yet, more than half (55 percent) are *not engaged*, simply putting in their hours.

3. You can invite change—an option most people never consider because it involves backing down from their original stance. Those engaged in personal battles or who remain stubbornly attached to their core beliefs may think change is tantamount to failure. Healthier individuals can look for win-win possibilities that open the door to creative solutions.
4. You can confront people honestly, openly and candidly. This is the most difficult to put into practice because we often fear conflict and lack the skills to work through it.

Keys to Managing Conflict

When conflict occurs, leaders must address it as soon as possible to prevent it from escalating into a chronic or pervasive problem. The following steps are critical:

1. Create rules of engagement. Establish procedures and rules for addressing conflict fairly.
2. Demonstrate the importance of caring. Nothing can be resolved in an atmosphere of distrust.
3. Depersonalize the issues. Focus on behaviors and problems, not on personalities.
4. Don't triangulate or bring in political allies.
5. Know when to let it go.
6. Know when to bring in a professional mediator, coach or trainer.

9 Tips for Difficult Conversations

1. Always start with the other person's agenda.
2. Listen without saying a word 70 percent of the time. Confirm you understand what the other person is saying 20 percent of the time, both verbally and nonverbally. In the remaining time, ask questions that advance the conversation's meaning.
3. Become a people reader. Pay attention to others' facial expressions.
4. Focus not only on what people are saying, but also on what they are *not* saying.

5. Frequently confirm what people are thinking, feeling and believing. Don't assume you know what they mean.
6. When people are trying to make their points, practice the art of saying "tell me more."
7. Don't go into difficult conversations unprepared. First, think about where you want to end up. Second, think about what's really going on. Finally, begin the process of discovering and designing an action plan.
8. From a communication standpoint, you get what you want by first giving others what they need.
9. At the end of every important conversation, review the commitments.

~~~~~*End of Leadership Article*~~~~~

**Continue reading Part 2: 4 Article Nuggets**

## Part Two: 4 Article Nuggets for *Managing Conflicts – Tough Conversations*

### *Instructions for optimal use:*

*These article nuggets are designed for you to include your own stories from work with your clients.*

*At a minimum, you should link back to your web pages that explain your services anytime a reference is made to coaching or another service you offer. I have included **suggested linking opportunities** in the body of the text like this: [\[link\]](#). Be sure to remove these before publishing.*

### **Managing Conflicts – Tough Conversations**

*“When conflict is ignored—especially at the top—the result will be an enterprise that competes more passionately with itself than with its competitors.”— Howard M. Guttman, *When Goliaths Clash*, [\[link to book with your Amazon or other affiliate link\]](#) 2003*

If you're in charge of people, you know how much of your time gets spent putting out fires, particularly interpersonal ones. In the work I do [\[link to page with your services\]](#) with managers, some tell me that at least 20 percent of their time is consumed by taking care of conflict.

But the problems don't stop there. Productivity decreases further when coworkers ruminate over arguments and disagreements.

Most of us work in a culture that values democratic processes and individual freedom. Some people encourage debate. I don't see this as a bad thing, as new ideas often spring from discussions, and from those who refuse to “go along just to get along.”

I believe that conflict should be neither suppressed nor ignored within an organization. When it goes unnoticed, it only gets worse and invites stress. Eliminating conflict is not the answer. I've seen companies take this approach and I've seen some disasters.

It may be getting worse. Anytime there are cutbacks, there is a rise in conflict. Trend analysts predict workplace conflicts will rise because people face increased pressure to produce more and better with fewer resources.

Job insecurity, a fluctuating economy, the stress of technological advancements, increased commoditization, and an epidemic of outsourcing and downsizing – these are only some of the factors that are putting stress on today's work force.

## The Leadership Edge

There is a strong link between the ability to resolve conflict and one's perceived effectiveness as a leader. According to research from the Management Development Institute of Eckerd College [[link to their site](#)] in St. Petersburg, Florida, effective managers resolve conflicts by employing four key behaviors:

1. *Gaining perspective*
2. *Creating solutions*
3. *Expressing emotions*
4. *Reaching out*

Those who succeed are deemed more suitable for promotion. But most managers are trained in the competencies required for their careers and industries. They aren't necessarily astute negotiators of people's emotions and relationships.

That may be behind the recent upsurge in demand for coaching services. [Suggested [link](#) back to your Web pages about your coaching services] The more people are stressed, the more they need help in managing their emotions and relationships. Conflict is often the catalyst.

Managed well, conflict can stimulate creativity, motivate people to stretch themselves, encourage peer-to-peer learning and help teams move beyond the status quo.

Your task, as a leader and manager, is to conduct tough conversations that help address workplace conflicts without wasting time. Conflict isn't something to take lightly.

Tough conversations are hard to have, worth having, but not worth risking poor outcomes. That's why I recommend working with an experienced coach. [[link](#)]

## Article Nugget #2

(Note: Add your own stories about your clients, and add links to your web pages for your products and services. Don't forget to remove the yellow suggested [link](#) annotations before publishing.)

### Three Sources of Conflict

In my experience working with organizations [\[link\]](#), there are three factors behind most organizational conflicts:

1. Differences in behavior and communication styles
2. Differences in priorities and values
3. Workplace conditions, including *poor communications from leaders*

Some personalities just seem to clash. It's important to determine why two people rub each other the wrong way. Do they have opposing behavioral styles?

For example, an extrovert who is open and expressive could view an introvert as hard to read and perhaps untrustworthy. Likewise, a time-conscious, highly organized employee may harshly judge a spontaneous colleague. Someone who is highly analytical and precise might view an intuitive person as impulsive and flaky.

Teaching team members to understand basic human differences can help them overcome tendencies to judge and make assumptions. They can learn to accept coworkers' differences. Consider using any of the commonly accepted assessment tools, such as the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#) (MBTI), another personality inventory or 360-degree feedback. [\[link to your own pages if you offer assessments\]](#)

Workshops [\[link\]](#) provide another option. An extrovert can learn to ask questions to draw out an introvert. The highly organized team member can learn to set more realistic deadlines. Understanding personality differences can help prevent clashes and conflicts before they become ongoing problems.

I offer several options for learning about personalities in the workplace to help deal with differences and conflicts. [\[insert appropriate links to your Web pages here\]](#)

### Expectations and Assumptions

People have different needs, values, beliefs, assumptions and cultural frameworks. Our expectations are fed by past experiences. If you erroneously assume that others are essentially mirror images, your lack of clarity can create strife.

Leaders and teams must explore others' expectations, assumptions, underlying values and priorities. This can be accomplished in group or individual sessions, led by a manager or coach. When there is an elevated degree of conflict, it's wise to retain a professional who is trained in interpersonal skills and mediation. [Suggested [link](#) back to your site]

Behind every complaint is an underlying value that goes unsatisfied. Asking questions like "What's really important here?" often allows people to uncover competing values and priorities. You will facilitate more authentic conversations when you ask the right questions.

What do you think about these ideas? What do you see as a major source of conflict in your organization? I'd love to hear from you. [Insert [link](#)]

### Article Nugget #3

*(Note: Add your own stories about your clients, and add links to your web pages for your products and services. Don't forget to remove the yellow suggested [link](#) annotations before publishing.)*

### Communications and Perceptions

There are three fundamental communication styles: [link](#) to your web page on this]

1. Nonassertive
2. Assertive
3. Aggressive

Each of us has a preference, and we're capable of switching to another, as appropriate.

We are sometimes unaware, however, of how others perceive us. You may think you're being appropriately assertive, but a more sensitive or resentful coworker may perceive you to be aggressive.

Add to the mix gender differences, our personal agendas, and it's easy to see how communications breakdown and breed conflict. I see this happen all the time in organizations. It's hard to know how we come across with the language and tone of voice we're so accustomed to using.

### How Executives Contribute to Conflict

Executives contribute to conflict by communicating ambiguously, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Most of us want to avoid conflict, but we can sometimes "talk out of both sides of our mouths" and give mixed messages. Such ambiguous communication fosters an organizational climate that discourages commitment (at best) and promotes conflicts (at worst).

I'm not saying executives do this on purpose (although some do). But highly educated people are skilled in the language of diplomacy and often try to address the needs and desires of a wide audience. In trying to please everyone, they craft messages that border on double-speak.

This is more of an explanation but not a rationalization and it certainly isn't a good excuse.

Leaders need to be more direct, frank and clear. I'd like to see more executives stand up and remove the barriers to candor. Why don't more of them tell it like it really is?

Many executives are *sitting too close to the blackboard* to see their own communication errors. An unbiased professional coach or consultant can spot weaknesses and help correct approaches that contribute to conflict. [insert [links](#) here]

## How Organizations Contribute to Conflict

Several conditions make a workplace fertile ground for conflict:

1. If an organization has a **rigid hierarchical structure**, with an authoritarian leadership culture, expect incessant arguments and a robust rumor mill. In this type of environment, open communications are discouraged.
2. Is there a **poorly instituted reward/promotional system**, where unfair favoritism occurs?
3. When managers are forced to compete for **limited resources**, their agendas can prevent them from getting along with others. They become more concerned with their personal or departmental gains and forget about the organization's overall well-being.
4. **Change itself** can destabilize relations because people struggle when they're forced out of their comfort zones. Companies involved in mergers and/or acquisitions, for example, experience more conflict. Rapidly changing environments create a ripe atmosphere for stress, anxiety and conflict.

What do you think about these possible sources that create more conflict instead of helping people do their work in the best possible environment? I'd love to hear your comments. [[link](#)]

## Article Nugget #4

(Note: Add your own stories about your clients, and add links to your web pages for your products and services. Don't forget to remove the yellow suggested [link](#) annotations before publishing.)

### 19 Tips for Managing Conflict

I'd like to summarize here some practical steps for dealing with conflict at work. I've found many of these tips useful, no matter what kind of organization, or what kind of position you're working in.

In the work I do with managers, [insert [link](#) to Web page about your services] I don't know anyone who can't benefit from one or several of these tips. I hope you find them useful too.

### 4 Ways to React to Conflict

When conflict occurs, you can choose to react in one of four different ways:

1. **You can play the victim** and act betrayed. You can complain to those who will listen and create alliances against the offending party. This rarely works in the business world, yet many workers actively engage in such passive-aggressive behaviors instead of directly addressing conflict.
2. **You can withdraw**, either by physically removing yourself from the situation or emotionally and mentally disengaging. This may involve walking out of a heated meeting, moving to a new unit or team, or quitting your job. A Gallup Organization survey reports that, at any one time, as many as 19 percent of an organization's employees are *actively disengaged*. Worse yet, more than half (55 percent) are *not engaged*, simply putting in their hours.
3. **You can invite change**—an option most people never consider because it involves backing down from their original stance. Those engaged in personal battles or who remain stubbornly attached to their core beliefs may think change is tantamount to failure. Healthier individuals can look for win-win possibilities that open the door to creative solutions.

4. **You can confront people honestly**, openly and candidly. This is the preferred option, but it's the most difficult to put into practice because we often fear conflict and lack the skills to work through it.

## 6 Keys to Managing Conflict

When conflict occurs, leaders must address it as soon as possible to prevent it from escalating into a chronic or pervasive problem. The following steps are critical:

1. **Create rules of engagement.** Establish procedures and rules for addressing conflict fairly.
2. **Demonstrate the importance of caring.** Nothing can be resolved in an atmosphere of distrust.
3. **Depersonalize the issues.** Focus on behaviors and problems, not on personalities.
4. **Don't triangulate** or bring in political allies.
5. **Know when to let it go.**
6. **Know when to bring in a professional** mediator, coach or trainer. [\[link\]](#)

## 9 Tips for Difficult Conversations

1. Always start with the other person's agenda.
2. Listen without saying a word 70 percent of the time. Confirm you understand what the other person is saying 20 percent of the time, both verbally and nonverbally. In the remaining time, ask questions that advance the conversation's meaning.
3. Become a people reader. Pay attention to others' facial expressions.
4. Focus not only on what people are saying, but also on what they are *not* saying.
5. Frequently confirm what people are thinking, feeling and believing. Don't assume you know what they mean.
6. When people are trying to make their points, practice the art of saying "tell me more."

7. Don't go into difficult conversations unprepared. First, think about where you want to end up. Second, think about what's really going on. Finally, begin the process of discovering and designing an action plan.
8. From a communication standpoint, you get what you want by first giving others what they need.
9. At the end of every important conversation, review the commitments.

Let me know what you think. I'd also love to hear your favorite tips for handling conflict. You can leave me a comment here: [insert [link](#) or email]

~~~~~End of sample leadership article, parts one and two~~~~~

A note from Dr. Patsi Krakoff, co-founder of The Blog Squad and ContentforCoaches.com:

I hope you found this useful and helpful. My goals in giving you this free sample leadership article have been the following:

1. Show you **quality leadership content** for executive coach and leadership websites, e-newsletters and blogs
2. Show you what's possible to make an article go **from high-quality to high-results** both **with readers AND search engines** when publishing online
3. Create awareness that it's **possible to outsource** your leadership content through sites such as mine at ContentforCoaches.com
4. **Save you time and money** with your online coach and leadership content marketing

To that end, I'd like to give you a **discount bonus coupon** for any article subscription or individual article. Because you opted in to get this free sample, you can use this **10% discount code** to make a purchase in the next 30 days: **24/7Content**

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Let me know if you have questions.

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