

How to Have a Productive Conflict

1. Pick an appropriate time and place for conflicts.
2. Focus on desired goals rather than specific means for attaining goals. Try to identify areas of common goals rather than focusing on differences.
3. Try to use direct face-to-face channels whenever possible to avoid distortion.
4. Disclose your expectations and goals to the other party. Also explain reasons for your requests.
5. Ask questions and listen to the other party. Do not assume you know what they are thinking and feeling.
6. Do not hit below the belt or use strategies which exploit weaknesses you know in the other party because of your relationship with him/her.
7. Be empathic. Try to put yourself in the other person's place and to understand how you would feel if you were arguing the other position.
8. Be open to other alternatives for solving the conflict other than the one you had in mind. Consider the broadest range of solutions possible. Make suggestions and listen to the suggestions of the other party.
9. Be descriptive about behaviors or issues rather than evaluating the person with whom you are in conflict. (Use I statements).
10. Monitor your own nonverbal communication to be sure that you are not sending mixed messages to the other person – messages of anger, domination, frustration, insecurity, or fear.
11. Do not try to deal with too many issues at once. Break down complex conflicts into smaller parts that can be solved one at a time.
12. Try not to become defensive. Do not take criticism personally. Realize you can admit you are wrong about something without losing face if you do so gracefully.
13. Use metacommunication to get at deeper relational issues involved with the conflict. Ask questions like, "Why is that so important to you?" or "You sound pretty upset about that..."
14. Realize that emotional outbursts can serve a useful function of catharsis. This means that by blowing up, some people can let out frustration and anger and get it out of their system. At these times, one of the best things to do is simply to wait, and to listen without becoming defensive and counter-attacking. At the end of their speech, you can ask, "What do you want to do about this?" and involve them in problem-solving.