

A GUIDE FROM BFA KONTOR

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

With this reader-friendly guide, maintaining a positive, friendly atmosphere at work will be much easier on a day-to-day basis. You can access the guide at www.bfakontor.dk along with a range of other useful materials produced by BFA Kontor.

The guide explains how two parties can manage conflicts in the early stages before the situation escalates to a level where outside help is required. As dialogue is the only sensible way to resolve conflicts, the training covers how to enter and engage in dialogue in which both parties are heard, learn to listen and are brought to a position of mutual understanding.

The guide introduces the Conflict Ladder, which describes the nature of a conflict and the typical course a conflict takes if left to escalate. It also explores the human behaviours that ignite and fuel conflicts and offers tools to help those involved in or witnessing a conflict.

Finally, the guide offers advice on how to communicate in an appropriate way before, during and after a conflict, bearing in mind that good communication is not only about learning how to have your say and what to say, but also how your body language underlines or undermines your message.

Enjoy your read

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What is a conflict?

There are many definitions of a conflict. The one we have chosen to apply includes three elements (in bold):

A conflict is a **disagreement** where **one or more** of the people in the situation become **emotionally** involved.

DISAGREEMENT

A conflict always centres on people disagreeing over a specific issue.

ONE OR MORE

There are two people in a conflict situation, even if only one of them experiences the situation as a conflict. Thus, if your colleague or a customer is angry or irritated with you about something you have said or done, you are in a conflict situation - no matter how you are experiencing the situation yourself.

EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED

What sets a conflict apart from a disagreement is that at least one of the people in the situation becomes emotionally involved. In a disagreement, you can accept each other's different opinions and discuss the matter between yourselves. A conflict does not break out until you react to what the other person says or does personally and become angry, irritated, sad, etc.



You are in a conflict situation with a colleague – what do you do?

You no longer enjoy being at work. You are having a difficult time with a colleague, and it is affecting your mood. You are spending time and energy thinking it over and talking to your colleagues about it. You explain what your colleague says and does – and why you think it is unfair or unacceptable. You tell people how you have reacted towards the colleague – and you know deep down that you are right about how you have experienced the situation. Your colleague has clearly behaved badly. What do you do?

YOU ENGAGE IN OPEN DIALOGUE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUE

Engaging in dialogue may not seem like the natural thing to do, but you can prepare for it by:

- accepting the conflict
- staying level-headed
- thinking carefully about the situation.

After this process, which is described in more detail below, you will be ready to engage in dialogue.

ACCEPT THE CONFLICT

Where there are people, there are emotions. And where there are emotions, conflicts will arise. It is therefore important to avoid blaming yourself or your colleague. The conflict is no one's fault. Conflict situations are natural – though they may not feel that way. They can happen to anyone.

STAY LEVEL-HEADED

We typically react to conflict by attacking or avoiding the issue. Attacking aggressively by giving as good as we get, or worse.

Avoiding conflict and confrontation by outwardly pretending that nothing happened, while feelings are raging on the inside. In both cases, the conflict will escalate and get worse.

In order to manage and resolve conflicts, we must pause and try to remain level-headed.

Start by calming down and accepting your emotions. It is acceptable to be angry, but it is unacceptable to take it out on others – no matter how they have acted towards you.

THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT THE SITUATION

Once you have calmed down, consider the situation.

- What actually happened? Be objective and try not to be defensive from the start or blame your colleague. Avoid generalising or understating / exaggerating.
- What made you react emotionally? Try to understand why your colleague's behaviour has affected you like this.
- What made your colleague react emotionally? Try to understand why your behaviour affected your colleague in this

way. If you have the energy for it, try to put yourself in your colleague's place.

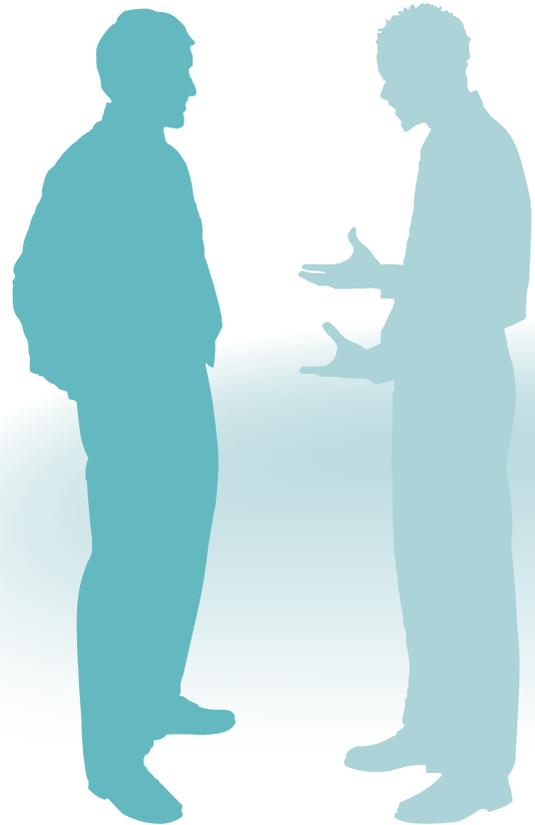
ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

When you have prepared yourself and feel ready for a dialogue, you can suggest that you have a talk. Think about whether you are most comfortable doing this in writing or face-to-face. Do not mention the conflict itself - but make it clear that you do not think your relationship is what it used to be, but without blaming your colleague or explaining yourself. Remember, the conflict is no one's fault.

Most people will accept an invitation to talk. Remember that your colleague has probably not prepared themselves for a dialogue as you have. This means that you will most likely be more accommodating - be understanding and do not let their reaction provoke you.

Accept the situation if your colleague does not want to talk to you - even though you may be disappointed or even angry. In this case, it is better to find someone from your organisation to help manage the conflict.

This guide will help you understand what conflicts are, how they escalate and what tools are useful in a dialogue. If you ever find yourself in a situation where a colleague needs your help or if you are in a conflict situation with, for example, a customer, client or colleague, then the guide is here to support.



The Conflict Ladder

The Conflict Ladder can be used to understand why and how a conflict escalates and what you can do to de-escalate it. It is important to understand that a conflict will always escalate and worsen if no one takes the initiative or takes action to de-escalate it. It is much easier to manage a conflict on the lower steps of the ladder, and much harder once the conflict has escalated to the three highest steps. The key is to identify potential conflicts as early as possible.

The escalation of a conflict is not unavoidable, but it is predictable if nobody takes steps to de-escalate it.



STEP 3: FURTHER PROBLEMS

The conflict will now escalate further and grow as more problems are brought up and discussed. The parties will remember previous disagreements or conflicts. Old conflicts are used to make sweeping statements about the other party never doing something, always doing something, or acting in a certain way.

STEP 2: BLAME (THE PERSON)

The situation develops, and you are now 'playing the man instead of the ball'. Criticism gets personal and you think the other person is the reason why the disagreement cannot be resolved. Both parties will explain themselves and defend themselves while blaming the other. Neither feels that the other is listening or trying to understand.

STEP 1: DISAGREEMENT (THE ISSUE)

A conflict starts with a disagreement of some kind. If the parties can discuss the matter without becoming emotionally involved, a conflict will not arise. At this stage, the parties are not bothered about disagreeing. However, be aware of the fine line between disagreement and conflict.

STEP 7: SEPARATION

At this point, neither of the parties involved can stand to be near each other. Often one of them will go on a leave of absence or find another job. Sometimes the workplace will no longer tolerate the change in behaviour and dismisses one of the parties due to for instance cooperation difficulties, increased absence from work or poorer work quality.

STEP 6: OPEN HOSTILITY

The conflict is now very uncomfortable and ugly, and unpleasant things are being said and done. The parties no longer see each other as human beings, for better or worse, but lose compassion for each other and react by treating each other in unacceptable ways. Some conflicts end with both parties resorting to physical violence.

STEP 5: CREATING AN ENEMY

The conflict will not disappear just because the two parties have stopped talking. On the contrary. Each of them will feel the need to talk to others about the conflict - to have others support their belief that they are in the right about how they are experiencing the situation and that the other party is in the wrong. They will talk to other colleagues, as well as friends and family. At the workplace, some people will choose sides while some would rather not get involved. Alliances are formed, and the idea of an enemy is created. This creates an 'us versus them' situation where some are the heroes and others are the villains.

STEP 4: CONVERSATION IS ABANDONED

The discussion between the two parties has now been ongoing for a while and more and more problems have been raised with both parties feeling as if they are not being heard or understood. In the end, either or both will give up talking to the other. The attitude will be that nothing will make any difference anyway and that talking to or being in the presence of the other party is impossible.



Tools for conflict management

You need tools to manage conflicts. Tools to help you react differently and more appropriately next time you are in a conflict situation.

ALL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IS ABOUT ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE

Generally speaking, all conflict management is about engaging in dialogue with the other party involved in the conflict. By dialogue, we mean a conversation where both parties are heard, listened to and understood. Active listening and questioning techniques are explained on pages 10-11.

It is important that both parties recognise the point at which they are ready to engage in dialogue. It is difficult to take the initiative to start a dialogue when you are emotionally involved in a conflict. You need to be level-headed and calm so that you can use the tools explained in this guide.

Another important step is to rank the conflict on the Conflict Ladder. The higher it is, the bigger and more emotionally charged the conflict is and the harder it will be to start a dialogue. Conflicts that have not escalated above Step 3, where more problems arise, can typically be resolved by the parties themselves. Conflicts that have escalated to at least Step 4, where all conversation is abandoned, will need outside help.

STEP 7: SEPARATION

Not enough room for both of us.

STEP 6: OPEN HOSTILITY

Hurting the other party.

STEP 5: CREATING AN ENEMY

The heroes and the villains.

STEP 4: CONVERSATION IS ABANDONED

More emotions and less understanding.

STEP 3: FURTHER PROBLEMS

Both old and new problems.

STEP 2: BLAME

The situation is the other person's fault, we defend ourselves and do not listen to the other party.

STEP 1: DISAGREEMENT

Both parties try to resolve the disagreement in a sensible and constructive way

WHAT HAPPENS TO A PERSON IN A CONFLICT SITUATION?

When a person is in a conflict situation – that is, when they are emotionally involved in an issue with another party – the discussion changes from being calm and rational to being heated and irrational. You are at the mercy of your emotions and that will affect the way you behave towards other people. You:

- **Cannot listen** You do not have the patience or the energy to listen to others – and you are only interested in defending and explaining yourself regarding how you understand the situation.
- **Cannot understand good arguments** No other arguments are good enough – only your own. You want it your way, you only want to hear what you want to hear, and you twist the other person's words to fit your own understanding of the situation.
- **Need to tell your own story** You need to explain how you understand the situation. The person who is listening needs to show genuine interest and needs to try to listen and understand the situation from the other person's point of view. You do not need to agree, you only need to accept and respect the other person's experience.
- **Will feel calm** When you are listened to and understood, you will feel calmer, as you do not have to listen to and understand what other people have to say, but instead have a chance to explain how you see the situation. It is also easier to see the bigger picture and maybe even see the situation from the other party's perspective when you hear yourself tell the story.

WHAT CAN YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE IN A CONFLICT SITUATION?

It is important to identify conflict as early as possible – preferably at Steps 2 or 3.

You can identify a conflict at Step 2 by noticing that either you or the other party have become emotionally involved in your discussion. The goal is therefore for the parties to become emotionally detached from the conflict, so that they can return to discussing the matter in a calm and rational way at Step 1.

You can identify a conflict at Step 3 by noticing that one of you is bringing up other problems. At this point, it is important to return to the original problem and discuss only that issue. All other problems must be set aside for now.

Both parties need to become emotionally detached once more for the conflict to return to Step 1. This is vital, as otherwise, the problem that led to the discussion or conflict cannot be resolved. In other words: do not try to resolve the conflict when you first identify it. Instead, try to keep a level head and think about what is happening to you and to the other party – by putting your own needs aside for a moment and making room for the other party.

At Step 4 or higher, outside help is required – preferably ask someone who knows both parties well and whom both parties trust. Perhaps a colleague, a manager, someone from HR or a Health and Safety Representative.

- ✓ Give the other party a chance to tell their own story.
- ✓ Be curious and listen to what the other person is saying.
- ✓ Show that you are listening and that you understand.
- ✓ Ask questions about the other person's understanding of the situation.
- ✓ You need not agree, just accept and respect what the other person is saying.

Active listening

Being able to listen to another person is crucial when managing and resolving conflicts. Depending on how engaged you are, there are different ways to listen.

- **Cosmetic listening** When you pretend to listen but are not really listening.
- **Conversational listening** Typically what you do at a party or at the dinner table. You are listening to what is being said but are not really engaged in it. You can easily eat at the same time while thinking about what you want to contribute to the conversation.
- **Active listening** You are 100% present. You show, both with your body language and your full attention, that you are 100% engaged and that you are not doing anything else or thinking of anything else while listening.
- **Deep listening** You are so engaged that you also pick up on hidden signals, changes in body language and what is being said between the lines. This form of listening is typically used by coaches, psychologists and therapists. You show, both verbally and through your body language, that you are actively listening.

LISTEN VERBALLY

- ✓ Offer up encouraging comments such as "Yes", "Hmm", "OK", "I see" and so on.
- ✓ Repeat or rephrase what is being said.
- ✓ Reflect aloud on what you have heard.

LISTEN VIA BODY LANGUAGE

- ✓ Emit positive energy - smile and be energetic.
- ✓ Make your body language engaging - be open and welcoming.
- ✓ Make eye contact - without staring.

Questioning techniques

Like active listening, good questioning techniques are essential for successful conflict management.

Asking the other person in the conflict question is good because you:

- show that you are actively listening
- give the other party a chance to tell their story and to explain how they understand the situation
- ensure that you understand how the other party is experiencing the situation.

The kinds of questions you ask the other party matter - some are constructive and some are dead-end.

Constructive questions:

- are open - and allow scope for a long response, instead of just yes or no. Open questions often start with one of the six "wh" words: who, what, where, in what way, when and why.
- are short and simple - avoid asking long questions that are hard to understand and can easily reflect your own opinion and understanding of the situation instead.
- create clarity - help the other party understand issues that are unclear to them by asking them questions. They usually know the answer themselves if they get a chance to think about it.

- create involvement and engagement - ask about the things you sense the other party wants to talk about - try not to provoke them.
- go into detail - both parties may find the questions useful for exploring in more detail what happened.

Dead-end questions:

- are closed
- are accusing
- contain a choice between more than one option
- contain several questions in one.

EXAMPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE QUESTIONS

- ✓ What happened after the last time we talked?
- ✓ I would like to understand what happened. Try telling me...?
- ✓ How do you see our teamwork?
- ✓ Can you clarify what you said about...?

Help a colleague in a conflict

The need to help a colleague in a conflict situation will arise if that colleague is not taking the initiative to resolve the conflict. Perhaps the colleague is unaware of the conflict or has a hard time remaining calm and taking the initiative.

WHO AT THE WORKPLACE CAN HELP?

Anybody at the workplace can step in when they discover that a colleague is in a conflict situation, including a:

- Colleague
- Manager
- HR employee
- Health and Safety Representative
- Union Representative.

Even though your colleagues can typically manage conflicts up to Step 3 on their own, do not wait until the conflict escalates to Step 4 before trying to help. It is always best if conflicts - including your own - are managed as early as possible.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

The level of complexity and emotions involved will depend on how far the situation has escalated. You should therefore think about the best way to react, depending on your own energy and your role in the workplace.

- **Go directly to your colleague** If you have the energy necessary to approach and start a dialogue with one of the parties yourself, without escalating the conflict further, then this can be a good opportunity to help in a more informal way. This option can work especially well if you are a colleague or manager.
- **Go to a manager** If you cannot talk to the individual as a colleague, you can alert the manager of one of the parties instead. The manager can then choose to handle the situation personally or pass it on to someone else at the workplace.
- **Go to someone who is responsible for resolving conflicts at the workplace** Another solution can be to go directly to the person in charge of conflict management at the workplace. If your workplace does not have such a person, you can approach HR, your Health and Safety Representative or your Union Representative.

HOW CAN YOU PERSONALLY HELP YOUR COLLEAGUE?

If you choose to help the parties involved in the conflict, you need to use the same level of understanding and the conflict management tools described earlier: engaging in dialogue, active listening and questioning techniques.

Remember that a person in a conflict situation can find it hard to listen to sound arguments. Therefore you should not try to resolve the conflict or point out what one or the other should do. While they are emotionally involved, neither of the parties will be ready to listen or to resolve any problems. The only way to help them is by taking the exact same course of action you would take if you were in a conflict situation yourself: **engage in dialogue**.

Give your colleague the opportunity to tell their own side of the story and explain how they understand the situation, while you are actively listening and genuinely curious. Show that you are listening and that you understand. Use the **questioning techniques** described - and remember that you need not agree with your colleague, just accept and respect your colleague's experiences and story.

WHAT CAN YOU ACHIEVE?

Be realistic about what you can achieve if you choose to engage in dialogue with a colleague in a conflict situation. If you are not trained to manage conflicts, then your best course of action is to calm your colleague down by getting her/him to talk about how they understand the situation. This can help your colleague to remain level-headed and choose to manage the conflict instead of escalating it. The colleague might be willing to listen to good advice when it comes from you but be cautious and ready to step back if you sense any resistance from your colleague.

Perhaps the conversation between you and your colleague will not change their view of the conflict and, in that case, accept the fact that you could not help. But give yourself a pat on the back for trying! Now you can consider seeking help from others at the workplace.



Conflicts with customers

While working in an office, you will have contact with people outside your workplace. Depending on your work tasks in the office, these people could be customers, clients, members, and so on, but for ease of reference, we will use the term "customers".

The way that employees interact with customers also varies from business to business, via phone, email, online- or face-to-face meetings. No matter how you interact with your customers, the same tools are needed to manage any possible conflicts.

CONFLICTS WITH CUSTOMERS ARE DIFFERENT

Typically, conflicts with customers differ significantly from conflicts with colleagues.

- **The conflict escalates quickly** Conflicts with customers normally escalate faster than other conflicts. People often react more quickly and aggressively when they do not receive the level of service they expect.
- **Relationships with customers are not personal** Often conflicts with customers are not characterised by personal relationships. You have nothing in common except for the issue that sparked the conflict, and that creates less empathy. Customers will often see you not as a person but as a representative for the business where you work.

- **You are providing a service** As your task is to make sure the customer's needs are met, the relationship is not equal - this sometimes means putting your own needs aside. Of course, the customer has no right to behave unacceptably, but this means that you often need to be more flexible than in an equal working relationship between two colleagues.
- **You are responsible for managing the conflict** Because of the service you provide and the role that places you in, you will often be the one who needs to keep a level head and take the initiative to manage the conflict.

THE CONFLICT LADDER

The Conflict Ladder used to describe conflicts with customers has five steps. A conflict can start as a disagreement at Step 1 and escalate one step at a time during the dialogue between you and the customer. But you will also find that a conflict can skip steps altogether or begin at a higher step on the Conflict Ladder. It will not always be clear to you, but typically the customer will go through all the steps. For example, the customer could have been put on hold or been transferred several times before speaking to you and could therefore already be upset.



STEP 5: SEPARATION

At this point, you and the customer can no longer stand each other. If this is a phone call, one of you will hang up. If it is an email exchange, one of you will not answer the other's email. If it is a face-to-face meeting, one of you will leave the room - in rare cases, the customer will be asked to leave the building because of unacceptable behaviour. The customer thinks that it is impossible to get you to listen or understand, and they feel that they might as well end your relationship.

STEP 4: OPEN HOSTILITY

The conflict is now very uncomfortable and ugly, and unpleasant things are being said and done. You and the customer will no longer see each other as human beings, for better or worse, but as a specific type, and you react by treating each other in any way you like. You say and do what you want to. The customer is speaking to you in a very unpleasant way and in rare cases, the customer will even resort to physical violence.

STEP 3: FURTHER PROBLEMS

The conflict will now escalate further and grow as more problems are brought up and discussed. The customer will feel that they are in a very typical situation and will remember others who have had the same problems with the company - or remember other problematic things about the company.

STEP 2: BLAME (THE PERSON)

The conflict does not arise until one party says or does something that makes the other party angry or irritated. Then the situation develops, and you are now 'playing the man instead of the ball'. Criticism gets personal and you think the other person is the reason why the disagreement cannot be resolved. Both parties will explain themselves and defend themselves while blaming the other. At this stage, the customer will feel that you are not listening nor trying to understand.

STEP 1: DISAGREEMENT (THE ISSUE)

A conflict starts with a disagreement of some kind. If you and the customer can discuss the matter without becoming emotionally involved, a conflict will not arise. At this stage, it is acceptable for the customer to disagree with you. **Be very aware of the fine line between disagreement and conflict.**

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE CUSTOMER?

Why does the conflict with the customer escalate even though you have explained the company's rules or the terms of your deals repeatedly?

A customer who is emotionally involved in a conflict no longer behaves in a rational way and will not resolve the matter, even if they feel that is what they are attempting.

The situation has turned into a personal battle. The customer feels that they are being blamed and not being heard. The customer will easily misunderstand what is being said or simply ignore it.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE A CONFLICT WITH A CUSTOMER?

When managing a conflict with a customer, you need to use the same level of understanding and conflict management tools described earlier.

You need to **engage in dialogue** with the customer and give them the opportunity to tell their side of the story and explain how they are experiencing the situation. Be genuinely curious and **listen actively**. Show that you are listening and that you understand and use **questioning techniques** to ask how the customer is experiencing the situation. Remember that you do not need agree with the customer - just accept and respect how the customer feels.

When in the midst of a conflict with a customer, the important objective is not about solving the problem or discussing the issue that started the conflict. Your objective should be to **calm the customer down** and free them from their emotional involvement in the matter.

You cannot discuss the issue itself until you are back at Step 1 of the Conflict Ladder where there is no emotional involvement. Before talking about the matter with no blame or personal attacks, you will need to establish mutual understanding and a good connection with each other.

You cannot think clearly and rationally when you are emotionally involved. How long it takes to de-escalate the conflict back to Step 1 depends on the specific conflict.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AT EACH INDIVIDUAL STEP ON THE CONFLICT LADDER?

STEP 1: DISAGREEMENT (THE ISSUE)

At this stage it is still possible to prevent the disagreement from becoming a conflict. The customer is not yet emotionally involved and will listen to sound arguments - but also needs to be heard and understood. Try to avoid saying anything to provoke the customer or anything that makes them angry. For example, do not interrupt them or do other tasks while talking to them. Give the customer time to explain and show that you are listening and that you understand. It is easier to not get annoyed with the customer when you are focused on the issue.

STEP 2: BLAME (THE PERSON)

Now the customer is emotionally involved, irritated, or angry. Ask the customer questions and let them tell you how they are experiencing the situation. Show that you are listening and that you understand. Remember that you do not need to agree with the customer, you only need to accept and respect how they feel. Try not to correct the customer, explain the situation to them or express your own opinion before you are back at Step 1.

STEP 3: FURTHER PROBLEMS

Avoid discussing other problems that the customer may bring

into the discussion. This will only escalate the conflict. You should not ignore these other problems, but instead try to convince the customer to focus on the current issue. You could, for example, explain to them that you would like to talk about these other problems afterwards but that, for now, you would like to focus on the issue you are currently talking about.

STEP 4: OPEN HOSTILITY

It can be hard to make progress at this stage, as both you and the customer will typically be very emotional.

- 1. The conflict between you and the customer has escalated.** You can try to manage the conflict if you are able to keep a level head. Ask yourself: Do you think the customer is the world's biggest idiot? Have you said or done something unkind yourself? Then own up to it and apologise. Try saying, "I'm sorry that I...". Remember to not take responsibility for the conflict. Reacting in a different or unexpected way will also make the customer pause for a while. Try getting the customer to talk to you again by asking more about how they are experiencing the situation.
- 2. The customer was already angry.** Remember this is not about you personally. Avoid seeing the customer as difficult. Remember that it is the situation itself that is difficult. If you think you can and have the energy to handle the situation, then you can try to use some of the tools we have mentioned. If you do not think it is worth trying to handle the situation, you can choose to "serve" the customer and ignore the angry accusations, or you can stand up to the customer's accusations. Try saying, "I'd prefer if you didn't shout and call me names. It's very unpleasant. If you want to continue this conversation, I insist that you lower your voice and talk to me more calmly". Try to say this without sounding angry or reproachful.

STEP 5: SEPARATION

If you can calm yourself, you can try to re-establish contact with

the customer and start a new conversation. For example, you can say/write: "I'm sorry that the situation developed in this way and that I got annoyed with you. I would like to start over. Should we try again?"

- You can also transfer the account to a colleague who can take over the contact. Or you can accept that the conflict was not resolved - and that it is OK.

It is important to acknowledge that resolving a conflict is very difficult once it has escalated to the final step of separation. The customer will see the situation as hopeless and, consequently, a major shift in the dialogue will be required once you or a colleague try to contact them again. If, for example, you have shown annoyance, then try to be more welcoming. If you have said or done something nasty, then try to apologise.



Good advice on conflict management

- ✓ Identify the conflict as early as possible. Be aware of the fine line between a disagreement and a conflict at Steps 1 and 2. You can gain a lot by heading off the conflict in its early stages.
- ✓ Once you discover that you are in a conflict situation, try to keep a level head and engage in dialogue.
- ✓ Do not see the other party as difficult (do not be personal) but see the situation itself as difficult (be professional).
- ✓ First, try to understand - then try to be understood.
- ✓ Use active listening and ask constructive questions.
- ✓ Do not assume that you know what the other party means or thinks. It is better to ask twice.
- ✓ Try to put the situation into words. Express aloud how you are experiencing the situation - without blaming the other party.
- ✓ Be factual. Only say things that the other party can recognise as facts. Everything else can easily be misunderstood or taken as an accusation.
- ✓ Make solving the issue a two-person job. "What can we do...?"
- ✓ If you lack the energy to manage the conflict, accept that and ask someone in your workplace for help before the conflict escalates and becomes too difficult to manage.
- ✓ Practise active listening and questioning techniques in other work-related situations with colleagues and customers - also in "easy" situations!
- ✓ Put conflicts and conflict management on the agenda at your workplace. Talk openly about what you do or what you find difficult when you are in a conflict situation with someone else.



Good advice on communication

HOW YOU ACT

- ✓ Are you angry, upset or irritated? Then you are not ready to engage in dialogue.
- ✓ Do you think the other person is being difficult? Try seeing the situation itself as difficult instead.
- ✓ Use active listening. Be present and listen. Avoid thinking about what you want to say next.
- ✓ Use questioning techniques. Be curious. Ask a lot of constructive questions.
- ✓ Focus on understanding the deeper meaning. Do not judge the situation only by what the other party says.
- ✓ Accept and respect how the other party is experiencing the situation - even if you do not agree!
- ✓ Be engaged. Take control of the situation and show that you want to resolve the conflict.

YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

- ✓ Stand or sit still. This signals calmness.
- ✓ Stand or sit facing the other party with open hands and arms. This signals openness.
- ✓ Make eye contact with the other party. This signals interest and focus.
- ✓ A small smile shows that you are positive.
- ✓ Keep an appropriate distance. Being too close can seem threatening. Being too far away can seem indifferent.

WHAT YOU SAY

- ✓ Speak calmly and with a clear voice. Do not speak too loudly or too quietly or too fast or too slow.
- ✓ Speak in short sentences and ask short questions. This is clearer and easier to understand.
- ✓ Listen all the way to the end - try not to interrupt.
- ✓ Do not answer before you have fully understood a question or a situation.
- ✓ Be open and positive in your choice of words. Do not say "Why" or "I don't think so", but rather "Tell me more..." or "I want to understand..."
- ✓ Speak for yourself. Use "I" instead of "you", which can easily seem more reproachful. Say "I don't agree that..." instead of "It's not true when you say that..."
- ✓ Say what you need to say - avoid sounding reproachful. "I need our meeting to start on time" instead of "It's annoying that you're always late to our meetings".
- ✓ Use humour if it seems appropriate for the situation - for example at Step 1, to try to end the disagreement.

"Conflict management" is a reader-friendly guide for maintaining a positive, friendly atmosphere at work. The guide explains how two parties can manage conflicts in the early stages before the situation escalates to a level where outside help is required. It explains about the human behaviours that ignite and fuel conflicts and, explores how dialogue is the only sensible way to resolve conflicts.

The guide has been made in association with coach and conflict mediator Marianne Lassen, Stockfleth & Lassen Aps.

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The different parties within the labour market in Denmark work together in sector committees to ensure a good working environment. This work includes publishing concrete sector-specific guidelines, information materials, and tools on current issues regarding the working environment as well as meetings, events and so on.

This guide was produced by the BFA Kontor committee, which is a part of BFA Handel, Finans og Kontor.

The committee comprises representatives from the following organisations: Dansk Erhverv, HK Privat, Dansk Industri, HK Handel, Lederne and Prosa.

You will find the guide on the committee's website at www.bfakontor.dk

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