

Conflict Mediation Tips for Supervisors & Managers



A. Preparing for the Mediation Session

1. Identify the factors/variables that have led you to the conclusion that you should mediate this conflict resolution with these employees.
2. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - What can you anticipate happening during the session?
 - What can you do to prepare for those occurrences?
 - How would you handle a situation in which the mediation conversation becomes confrontational?
 - What expectations do you have for employees after the mediation session? What next steps do you have in mind to facilitate improved relationship and communication? [e.g., joint project, weekly meetings, future mediated sessions, etc.]
3. Reflect on and discuss individually with each employee the following:
 - What are the possible underlying issues?
 - What do you think caused the conflict?
 - What are the consequences of having this conflict?
 - What is the goal of resolving the conflict?
 - Expectations for their participation during the mediation.
 - Desired outcomes of the mediation session.
4. Arrange a time and place for the session, in a neutral location conducive to privacy and quiet conversation.



B. During the Mediation Session

1. Initiating the mediation session:

- Review your objectives for the session, the agenda and the process you will use.
- Clearly state your role as mediator is to be neutral and to keep the process on track.
- Set a time limit for the meeting with an agreement on whether continuing at a later time will be an option at the end of the meeting.
- Set clear expectations for cooperation, behavior, and resolution.

2. Set rules of engagement:

- Ask the participants to develop the rules and to identify any trigger words they would prefer not be used.
- Makes suggestions of rules as needed to prompt their ideas, including the following:
 - Keep to issues and the goal – (resolution for the department, not personal territory or win versus lose.)
 - Refrain from using “trigger” or argumentative words and phrases such as:
 - “That’s wrong.”
 - “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”
 - “Stop interrupting me.”
 - Any words the participants individually identify as triggering for them
 - No value- or judgment-laden orders such as: should’s, ought’s, need to’s
 - Each person should tell it like they see it and get everything out on the table without interruption when it is their turn to speak.

3. Techniques and questions for encouraging the participants to speak honestly about the conflict and to get everything on the table:

- Have the participants share one thing they appreciate about the other person or one positive quality of the other person.
- Give each person a set amount of time to speak (2-3 minutes) and take turns.

- Don't assume each side understands the other's point of view... have each of them state it clearly and in the open. Prompt them to say some of the things they told you individually (without sharing them yourself unless absolutely necessary).
- Ask the other person to restate what they heard the first participant say. Confirm understanding with the initial speaker. Then ask have the second person respond. Repeat the process in reverse.
- *Questions to prompt discussion:*
 - ✓ What is the goal of resolving this conflict?
 - ✓ What are your thoughts about the current situation?
 - ✓ What do you think caused the conflict?
 - ✓ What are the underlying issues?
 - ✓ What are the consequences of having this conflict?
 - ✓ What have you tried to do to address this conflict?
 - ✓ What has and hasn't worked?
 - ✓ Are there any issues you are finding particularly difficult to let go of?
 - ✓ What common goals do you have?
 - ✓ Is there anything else on your mind?

4. **Focus on the future:** Once feelings and information are shared and understood, shift to problem-solving and next steps.

- Review and discuss: What needs to happen right now?
- Use an agreed-upon decision making process:
 - ✓ What is our objective/goal? What are we trying to accomplish?
 - ✓ What are the options? Brainstorm possible solutions/ideas.
 - ✓ Evaluate the options: what are potential outcomes of each of these options? Review pros/cons of each.
 - ✓ Select the best solution and get agreement from the parties.
- Confirm agreement of next steps.
- Share any expectations or assignments that you have identified for them.
- Clarify how you will follow up with each of the employees after the session.
- Let the participants know that you will memorialize the agreement in writing.