

Have a Nice Conflict!

If you've spent your life trying your best to *avoid* conflict, this month's headline may be confusing. That's because most of us have always viewed conflict as an unpleasant, sometimes even violent encounter with another individual. But in reality, conflict is actually a "clash" of competing ideas or opinions – and it's possible to avoid the "clash" and address differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Impossible? Not according to Tim Scudder, CEO of an international firm that helps top companies to better deal with conflict in the workplace. As co-author of *Have a Nice Conflict: A Story of Finding Success and Satisfaction in the Most Unlikely Places* (www.haveaniceconflict.com), Scudder cites recent research indicating that the top reason why people leave their jobs is because of a poor relationship with an immediate supervisor. If only there were a way to make conflicts productive, the benefits to the individual worker and the employer could be enormous. Scudder's book shows how this can be done by exploring the journey of John, who is denied a promotion he believed was well-deserved. When John shares his bitter disappointment with a counselor, he learns how to avoid becoming a victim and to better navigate future conflicts. This involves five processes:

- **Anticipate:** Prepare by thinking about whom you're dealing with and ask yourself how he/she may view the situation. This makes the initial resistance expected and understandable.
- **Prevent:** It's easy to fall prey to anger, but preventing harsh conflict is all about choosing a *better* behavior that will promote discussion instead of mutual rancor.
- **Identify:** There are three basic approaches in conflict—rising to the challenge, cautiously withdrawing or wanting to keep the peace. When you can identify these approaches in yourself and others, you are empowered to handle the situation more productively.

- **Manage:** Managing conflict has two components—managing yourself and managing the relationship. It's about creating conditions that minimize the emotional dimension of conflict. Managing yourself in conflict can be as easy as taking some time to see your position from another perspective.



- **Resolve:** To create movement toward resolution, we need to show others a path back to feeling good about themselves. When they feel good about themselves, they are less likely to feel threatened and are more likely to move toward compromise.

This is not to say that conflict can be made *easy*! Indeed, a research report by the University of Florida identifies eight major causes of workplace conflict and each has the potential to whip up extremely strong emotions:

- ✚ **Conflicting needs**
- ✚ **Conflicting styles**
- ✚ **Conflicting perceptions**
- ✚ **Conflicting goals**
- ✚ **Conflicting pressures**
- ✚ **Conflicting roles**
- ✚ **Conflicting values**
- ✚ **Conflicting policy interpretations**

Your Employee Assistance Program is not intended to become involved with workplace conflict (taking sides). However, your EAP can help you determine a pathway to resolution that will hopefully result in a "win-win" for all parties. Reflecting on the ideas set forth by Tim Scudder may be a good starting point!