To consistently succeed in today's business world, team leaders must sometimes deal with challenging people who can often create conflict on their teams. As a team leader, it is necessary for you to engage all of your team members in order to create consistent outstanding team results.

Conflict is a natural part of business. It also can be an opportunity to discover new approaches to challenges or hinder the implementation of change within your organization or team. As team leader, you must use the right approach to deal with team conflict in ways that resolve the issues while maintaining positive relationships between team members.

One classic team dysfunction is fear of conflict. When a team player has an issue with others, the problem can quickly spiral out of control. It is critical to face up to the challenge by dealing with the problems directly and as swiftly as possible.

When you understand different conflict resolution strategies, you will be able to more easily see things from another person’s point of view, engage your team members, and work effectively with difficult team members or situations before they cripple your team.

“The ability to deal with people is a purchasable commodity as sugar or coffee, and I will pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun.”
—John Rockefeller
1. CLEARLY DEFINE AND AGREE ON THE ISSUE THAT IS CAUSING A CONFLICT BETWEEN TEAM MEMBERS.

Identify the root cause of the problem and analyze ways to improve the situation. Address the issue at hand directly and diplomatically. Resist the urge to criticize, condemn, or complain to the individual or group. Describe the current problem and get agreement from both sides. As a manager, your team needs to be one hundred percent clear on the direction and vision.

2. PREPARE, DO YOUR HOMEWORK, AND BE SPECIFIC.

Talk to people’s strengths and past achievements, especially regarding team-building attributes. Prepare evidence of specific ways that a team member’s behavior has disrupted the effectiveness of the team. Show specific examples of how similar conflicts have been solved in the past and challenges have worked out to improve the team’s strength and engagement.

3. HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE.

Your attitude is essential to the outcome. Stay positive. It is said that employees don’t leave companies; they leave people. What managers do, how they behave, what they say, and perhaps most importantly, how they say it affects employees’ attitudes about their jobs. Let your team view and accept any role change, process, or organizational change in terms of the opportunities it presents. Try to see all team members in a positive way. If you have a difficult team member, try to list five strengths he or she has and show the team how those strengths can benefit the team’s goals.

“A manager’s ability to build strong relationships with employees, build strong team interaction and lead in a “person-centered” way creates an engaging environment in which employees can perform at the highest possible level.”

–DALE CARNEGIE RESEARCH STUDY
4. **WALK IN THE OTHER PERSON’S SHOES.**

Try to pretend that you’re in the other person’s position. Encourage conflicting team members to ask themselves: “How much do my personal biases and prejudices affect this relationship?” Attempt to determine their level of trust in the other team members and the process.

5. **LOOK FOR SIMILARITIES.**

Get your team on the same page by finding and establishing similarities. Focus on the future. Express common goals. Discuss specific plans to change team outcomes: more resources, new means of communication, more efficient meetings, and additional support.

6. **DEAL WITH FACTS, NOT EMOTIONS.**

Avoid criticizing or passing judgment on ideas and opinions. Maintain a rational goal-oriented state of mind. Focus on how negative team members’ behavior has impacted the team outcomes rather than focusing on personal disagreements. Outline ways to improve accountability for behavior and attitude.

“Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.” –Dale Carnegie

7. **PRESENT FACTS AND EVIDENCE. PROVIDE SUGGESTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES.**

Stay fact-focused rather than personality-focused. Build skills by working through differences. Suggest workable solutions and ask team members for their opinions or alternatives. Show your willingness to be flexible in achieving your organization’s goals.

“The attitude and actions of the immediate supervisor can enhance employee engagement or can create an atmosphere where an employee becomes disengaged.”

–Dale Carnegie Training Research Study

8. **ESTABLISH OPEN COMMUNICATION. LISTEN FIRST, TALK SECOND.**

Identify the behaviors that you could change in order to reduce the conflict. Use a friendly and calm tone of voice. Most team conflicts are rooted in communication breakdown. Show your team members how to listen attentively first and then express thoughts and beliefs tactfully when they differ from those just expressed. Always show respect for the other person’s opinions or views. Inspire the same communication style between your team members.

“Open and honest communication between employee and supervisor allows for greater understanding of both expectations and job performance.”

–Dale Carnegie Training Research Study

“Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.”

–Dale Carnegie
9. **DEMONSTRATE INTEREST IN THE OTHER’S PERSON POINT OF VIEW**

Put yourself in the other’s position. Encourage feedback. Use “I” and “we” messages rather than “you” messages. Listen with an open mind and wait when the other person is saying something. Try to rephrase what the other person has said in a way that aligns with the overall goals. Maintain perspective and sense of purpose. Look for areas of agreement and ways to negotiate compromise with others. Talk in terms of the team’s organizational goals and deadline. Don’t interrupt, ramble, or show poor listening skills.

“Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.”
–Dale Carnegie

10. **EXPLORE OPTIONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TOGETHER.**

After team members agreed on the problem and understand each other’s point of view, ask for input from the whole team. When all team members have a chance to share and offer their ideas, everyone on the team will feel satisfied with the solution.

11. **END ON A POSITIVE NOTE; REAFFIRM THE GOALS.**

Make a win-win proposal and make sure that everyone involved leaves the situation feeling they have been heard and respected. Give feedback so everyone on the team feels connected to the team effort and future goals. Encourage the team to discuss other potential challenges. Proactively develop solutions for these challenges to head off new conflict or challenges.

“Employee Engagement rates are directly tied to feelings about interaction with their immediate supervisor.”
–DALE CARNEGIE RESEARCH STUDY