How to Proactively Manage Conflict as an Employee

1. Conflict may be a normal part of everyone’s working and personal lives, but it feels terrible.
2. Conflict can occur when an individual’s needs, values, or ideas differ from the people around them, and there is no clear way to settle the dispute.
3. Being able to name the type of conflict will help to solve it. Here are four main reasons behind conflict at work:
   a. Indifference – this occurs when one individual believes another does not care about the work or they have checked out.
   b. Tension – this can occur when there is a lack of trust and no healthy way of asking questions about things such as deliverables, performance, or expectations.
   c. Struggle – individuals sometimes struggle with the same roadblocks over and over.
   d. Hostility – most often individuals become hostile over a misunderstanding that has spiraled out of control.
4. Bullying is different from conflict but is often confused with it.
   a. Bullying is repeated negative behavior by an individual or group that has power and control over another individual.
   b. Conflict ends, whereas there is no end in sight to the disrespectful behavior with bullying.
   c. Individuals should seek help if they experience bullying.
5. Outside intervention is sometimes needed in order to resolve conflict. If a compromise or productive solution can’t be worked out, it may be necessary to call in a mediator or outside party to help resolve the conflict.
6. Colleagues that are disengaged, or “checked-out”, can cause conflict in the office.
   a. Disengagement can come from several sources:
      i. Self-doubt
      ii. Mistrust
      iii. Burnout
   b. Expressing an interest in disengaged colleagues can help identify a productive solution. Try building a relationship and ask these questions:
      i. Do they feel they are respected and are an important member of the team?
      ii. Do they feel their work matters?
      iii. How can you help them?
7. Try using these tips to get past conflict when dealing with a hostile person:
   a. Get to know the person and see them as human and not an enemy.
   b. Pay attention to how they communicate with others they like and replicate that communication style.
   c. Ask for advice from someone you trust who can see the situation objectively.
   d. Resist the temptation to be hostile towards them.
8. The presence of tension indicates something may be wrong with the organization’s culture. Here are tips for individuals to help with creating a positive culture:
   a. Model the right behavior, including positive body language.
   b. Be intentional about setting the right tone and being in the right frame of mind before meetings and interactions with others.
   c. Get clear on deliverables, by creating a clear outline of who will deliver what, how they will do it, and when it will be completed.
   d. Individuals can mentor themselves and determine where self-improvement can be made.

9. When faced with repeated struggles at work, consider using an exercise called the pre-mortem. This exercise involves imagining how something will fail in the future and working backwards to address those individual points of failure before starting. Here are the steps in more detail:
   a. Imagine something difficult or that might be a struggle to achieve (such as asking for a raise, or starting a new project or difficult conversation, etc.)
   b. Set a timer and list all the ways it will fail, including all the mistakes that will be made.
   c. Review this list and address each item before starting, or at least keep them in mind when moving forward.

10. If the conflict involves the supervisor, try using some of the tools noted in this course (and as outlined in this handout) to address the conflict. Remember to practice empathy towards the supervisor, as they are also human.

11. When dealing with chaos, ambiguity, or conflict, individuals should strive to be the leader for which they are looking to help diffuse conflicts and make situations better.

12. Use these questions to distinguish between a work environment that holds opportunities for growth versus one where change and transformation would be near impossible:
   a. Am I proud of the work that I’m doing?
   b. Do I have more good days than bad?
   c. When not at work, do I miss the work or my colleagues?
   d. Can I speak up about things I would like to see changed without fear of getting fired?

13. Try a 30-day wellness challenge and evaluate the outcomes when deciding whether to stay in a job or leave it after doing the following:
   a. Work ordinary hours only.
   b. Put away mobile devices after work and spend time with friends and family.
   c. Eat nutritious meals and get enough sleep.
   d. Decide at the end of the 30 days whether to stay or look for a new job.