



OFFICE OF  
**HUMAN RESOURCE  
DEVELOPMENT**  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

## Academic Leadership Support

Office of Quality Improvement & Office of Human Resource Development



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### 8 Steps For Conflict Resolution Overview

#### 6. Approach Problem-Solving with Flexibility

- **Identify Issues Clearly and Concisely**
- **Generate Options (Brainstorm), While Deferring Judgment**
- **Be open to "tangents" and other problem definitions**
- **Clarify Criteria for Decision-Making**

At this stage of the discussion, good rules for problem solving and analysis apply. Use whatever tools and processes you may have at your disposal in order to engage in a creative, and productive process, as well as the use of an external facilitator or mediator if you feel it would be beneficial to the group engaged in negotiations.

Be sure to take one issue at a time, starting with an issue that both of you agree is worthy of discussion. Try to make it a "bitable bite," rather than the most difficult issue of conflict.

*Generate several possible solutions to the problem*, "brainstorming" ideas or otherwise making sure that all parties participate in the process. At this stage, it is important to defer judgments and evaluations of potential solutions, for to do so prematurely risks creating a "chilling effect" on the further generation of ideas. If one idea is rejected too quickly, other ideas may be similarly rejected without appropriate consideration. Even if you quickly identify an acceptable solution, it is useful to explore a few additional ideas before settling on the best answer to the problem.

*Clarify the criteria* that you are using for evaluating options - sometimes, this can be an important insight for people as they negotiate, because they may have different notions of what they value in a good solution. For example, one person may value a quick solution, while the other wants one that is longer lasting. One person may want to do something that is inexpensive, staying within our current budget, while the other person may feel that it is okay to spend more today to save money and stress in the future.

*Good solutions to problems emerge from mutually acceptable criteria being applied in a clear decision-making process.* Understand the power present in the room to solve the problems being presented... Sometimes, you may bemoan a situation over which you have limited control. It may be important to acknowledge the larger issue or another concern that is beyond your control, but it is important to prevent such concerns from becoming "tangents" that take up your time and energy in less constructive ways. If it feels like the discussion has drifted into another area, check for clarification of the agenda at hand: "I'm confused. Earlier, we were discussing Issue A, now I hear you raising some concerns in a new area... is this where we want to focus, or should we return to Issue A?" This type of query can help clarify what the other person is intending, allowing you to either support this shift or express why you feel the original issue still needs your attention.

As you reach agreement regarding solutions to each of the problems being negotiated, *summarize these ideas in writing and restate them back to each other* to be sure everyone agrees with both the intent of the solution and its specific language. If it is appropriate to leave things a bit ambiguous, until other issues are discussed, this is fine; just be sure that at the end of the discussion there is a clear record that accurately conveys to all parties - as well as others who may have a need to understand how the problem has been solved - what you are now intending to do and how you plan to do it.

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