

HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT AVOIDERS

Some people with whom you relate have tremendous difficulty acknowledging and talking about negative feelings.

Because they want to keep the peace at any cost, they pretend everything is fine. They don't want to rock the boat. As a result, underlying resentments can grow and eventually destroy working relationships as well as personal relationships.

What should you do if you find yourself in a relationship with someone who is a conflict avoider?

Here are some tips that will enable you to encourage the person to work with you toward constructive problem solving, before the irritations turn to significant, relationship-harming issues.

1. Encourage and create opportunities for suggestions and feedback

Individuals who avoid conflict often will not take the initiative to approach you about things that are bothering them. Therefore, create regular times for discussion in which you invite suggestions and feedback.

2. Talk about how feedback helps you

Typically, conflict avoiders are very "nice" people. Therefore, it may be your task to show them see that feedback is a way of helping.

You might say something like this: *"One thing that is really helpful to me is when someone plays 'devil's advocate' with my ideas. I really want to hear the other side so that I can sharpen the way that I think about things. Would you help me with that?"*

3. Observe a person's body language and changes in normal patterns

Very often, when something is bothering a conflict avoider, the only place it shows up is in nonverbal behavior or in changes from the individual's normal behavior pattern. For example, if a female colleague been very talkative, then she becomes unusually quiet, something may be going on.

Use this observation as a way to share your concerns in a non-threatening tone. This may be something like, *"Jane, I've noticed that you became very quiet in that meeting the other day, and you haven't said much to me since that time. Is there anything that you reacted to there that we need to talk about?"*

4. "Normalize" the fact of irritations and conflict

Make statements to the person like, *"We all have ways that we disagree at times. That just keeps things interesting. What really matters is how we deal with our conflicts."*

5. Respond positively when the avoidant person risks sharing

Be sensitive to the fact that when people who dislike conflict do speak up, they are taking a risk. Many have secretly vowed never to speak up again when their comments are met with reactions like, *"We already tried that"* or even some defensive retort.

6. Prevent problems by not taking this person for granted

An avoidant person is prone to “take and take”, then feel used. He or she may be silent, but may deeply feel unappreciated because of unrequested, unheard opinions or hurt feelings that you don’t even know about. Head off problems by regular communication and sharing of ideas.

Dr. Bev Smallwood is a psychologist, professional speaker, and executive and personal coach who specializes in creating Magnetic Workplaces® and in bringing out the best in people. She's author of the upcoming book: *This Can't Be Happening to Me!*. Sign up for her free email newsletter at her website: <http://www.MagneticWorkplaces.com>.