

# Conflict: Don't Just Fight It, Manage It

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## **Sample of Content:**

Conflict is an ever-present feature of workplaces. When it is destructive, it is invariably because the participants don't know they have options. This article shows you the 7 options you always have in conflict.

## **Content:**

Conflict is an ever-present reality whenever people work together. It can manifest itself in differences of view, differences of opinion, differences of personality, and differences of interest. But conflict doesn't have to be destructive. If the right options are chosen to handle conflict – either as a strategy or as a tactical choice – the result can be of huge benefit to both sides. These are the 7 options you have.

1. **No Deal.** A no-deal outcome to a conflict means that the status quo is confirmed and nothing changes. No-deal is rarely a successful end to a conflict unless during discussions it becomes clear there is no advantage for you in continuing. No-deal, in the sense of walkaway power, can also be used tactically at any stage of the proceedings. To make sure you are not disadvantaged if your bluff is called when you threaten "No deal!", make sure you have a good second-best BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement) to fall back on.

2. **I Win, You Lose.** The "I win you lose" approach to conflict is also known as the World War One solution. At the end of World War One, the victorious Allies decided that, such were the horrors of the war, the defeated Germans should be humiliated and never again allowed to threaten their neighbours. The denigrating peace terms were completely one-sided but, as in all win-lose solutions, the losing side harboured deep resentment. It was only a matter of time before resentment led to a desire for revenge and the outbreak of a further war in 1939. When you use "win-lose" on others, you encourage them to find ways to use "win-lose" back on you.

3. **I Lose, You Win.** The "I lose, you win" approach to conflict should never be considered as a strategy. This is the route of appeasement, a quiet life and letting others have their way: sooner or later they will come back for more.

The story is told of a newcomer to an African village who became frightened by wolves at night so he threw them some antelope meat to appease them. The next morning he had the whole pack at his door.

"We've proved it again and again, That if once you have paid him the Dane-Geld You never get rid of the Dane." (Rudyard Kipling)

4. **Win At All Costs.** Win-at-all-costs is a negotiating strategy that is based on the belief that you are not responsible for the conflict and therefore will not budge an inch to the other side. You must be seen to win.

A simple demonstration of win-at-all-costs thinking is the £5 auction game. A group of people are invited to bid for a £5 note, starting at 50p and working their way up. Naturally, the bidding is brisk up to the £4.50 mark. But, more often than not, the bidding will pass the £5.00 mark and go higher. Winning now matters more than the prize itself!

5. **Compromise.** Although the end result of many negotiations is a coming together of positions and a settlement somewhere in the middle of extremes, compromise should not be a pre-planned strategy. This is because...

- it encourages a spirit of concession
- the other side will interpret your concessions as weakness and try to push you further
- negotiation is not about trying to be nice to one another

- your case may merit better than a compromise their case may merit worse.

6. **Arbitration.** Going to a third party is often suggested to resolve a negotiation stalemate but it should never be considered as an alternative to negotiations in the first place. If you're tempted to resolve all your differences through a third party, first remember this Indian fable.

As two otters were standing on the banks of the river Ganges, a great fish came swimming by. The first otter dived in but, unable to overpower it, begged the second otter for help. He too dived in and together they brought the fish to shore. Then they began to quarrel as to who should have it. A jackal came up to see what all the noise was about and they asked him to decide the case. The jackal cut off the fish's head and tail and said: "I divide the spoils equally" and gave the first otter the head and the second otter the tail and ran off himself with the middle part.

"Stop," shouted the otters, "you've taken the only part worth having." "I can't help that," said the jackal. "When you call in a lawyer, you have to pay his fee. You should have settled things together."

7. **Win-Win.** Win-win is the only strategy worth pursuing in negotiations. Just because the other side wins as well as you does not mean that your gain is any less. Win-win encourages constructive conflict: the belief that to come out on top does not only happen by destroying the opposition.

"It is as inappropriate to ask "who's winning?" in a successful negotiation as it is to ask "who's winning?" in a successful marriage. The answer, of course, is: we both are."

Two four-year-old boys were playing soldiers together.

"I want to be leader," said one.

"But I want to be leader," said the second.

"OK. You be the leader in front and I'll be the leader behind," said the first boy.

"OK," said the second boy.

The best strategy to pursue in conflict is a win-win solution. This is the belief that, despite all the differences, a solution is possible that will benefit both sides. When you think win-win, and act win-win, out of discord comes the greatest harmony.

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