

Conflict Resolution Competencies for Leaders

Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith propose that leaders who are willing to address workplace conflicts are unique and have a specific skill set. Although not all leaders innately have these competencies, with enough patience and practice, anyone can learn. In their book, *Resolving Conflicts at Work*, Cloke and Goldsmith describe six competencies to empower leaders.

Master the Context - Conflicts go beyond the individual level and are impacted by the values and frameworks within an organization's structures, systems, and cultures and even extend to the larger context of social, economic and political issues that indirectly impact the workplace. Leaders support values that move toward resolution (without forcing values or resolve) by exploring diversity, contextual disputes, and opposing views, while simultaneously looking for links and coalescing perspectives to join the conflicting sides.

Know Yourself - Leaders need to be aware of their biases, values, and assumptions about each conflict. This includes understanding and being cognizant of their personal histories around the topic of the conflict, their interpersonal relationships, and the conflict at hand. Leaders are willing to ask for help from others to provide additional skills in mediating conflict, especially if the leader is a part of the conflict.

Create a Vision for the Future - An inspiring vision allows people to maintain perspective even when there is opposition. When leaders mediate and support resolution, they elicit input and unifying solutions from all parties and create a meaningful and creative vision for change. This vision should be focused and one that excites people to work for resolution and change.

Communicate with Meaning - Leaders are acutely aware of the need to communicate the deeper meaning of a conflict to the people experiencing the conflict. They know that insults, attacks, unsubstantiated judgments or proclamations are not helpful. In their meaningful communication, a leader will focus on eliciting feedback through the use of questions in order to understand the deeper meaning for those involved.

Maintain Trust Through Integrity - Trustworthiness is crucial for creating change and moving toward resolutions. Leaders who are working to address conflicts are focused on consistently demonstrating integrity and trustworthy behaviors as well as valuing integrity from their coworkers. An approach that prioritizes integrity and trust helps to create personal change and change to an organization's conflict culture.

Realize Intention Through Action - The final competency for leaders is to put efforts toward action steps that are observable and measurable. Action steps demonstrate a leader's intention to create a positive environment, move toward resolution and find lasting concrete results. The key for leaders is to translate their insight about the conflict into tangible decisions, actions and agreements, thus impacting change in the greater context of the organizational systems, policies, structures, and interpersonal relationships.

After reading through these competencies, you might reflect on what you are able to do to gain insight to your skills in your varied roles as a leader. Identify areas of growth, and areas of strength. How might your skills as a leader help you address conflicts in your workplace?

Cloke, K., & Goldsmith, J. (2011). *Lead and Coach for Transformation*. In *Resolving conflict at work: Ten strategies for everyone on the job*. (pp. 241-271). NJ: John Wiley & Sons.