“Give us the tools and we will finish the job.” Winston Churchill

Preface

Unless you are a hermit, conflict is a reality in your life. If you are a leader, or aspire to a leadership role, much of your success will depend on how well you respond to conflict among those you lead or serve. Whether you manage a staff of two or 200, you will be expected to address and equitably resolve many conflict situations in the course of a month, a week, or even a day.

Will you be prepared to manage these conflicts? Will be you able to build rapport among battling parties and encourage their mutual cooperation? Will you have the finesse and problem solving skill needed to achieve a workable resolution while preserving the parties’ integrity and fragile relationship? Will you have the maturity and composure to persist with parties in conflict when they appear to have reached the limits of their willingness to bargain?

The ability to manage conflict is often viewed as more an art than a skill, suggesting that you are best advised to leave the management of conflicts in the hands of “professionals.” Yet while there is an art to a skillfully negotiated resolution, is it an art form that you can master with the right tools. Although some conflicts in the workplace may necessitate the involvement of a professional, such as a trained mediator or arbitrator, human resources representative or labor relations specialist, many more conflicts will depend on your intervention as a manager. To be successful, you will need to build on your foundation of communication and leadership capacities and apply them to the kinds of conflict management strategies and methods that this book provides.

This book is both a classroom text and an on-the-job guide for the individual who has received no formal preparation in managing conflict and needs “instant” skill-building and practical methods for handling organizational and personal conflicts. Yet it also offers insight for the aspiring professional who, though expert in the subject matter of his or her field and educated in conflict theory and negotiation strategy, needs grounding in basic interpersonal communication and management skills, such as building rapport, empathic listening, behavior modeling, reframing, problem solving, and decision making.

This text is divided into six sections. The Introduction (Chapter 1) discusses the Nature of Conflict. Section I (Chapters 2-4) covers the Theory and Context for Managing Conflict in the Workplace. Section II (Chapters 5-7) covers Interpersonal Communication Skills for Resolving Conflict. Section III (Chapters 8-9) covers Preparing to Resolve Conflicts. Section IV (Chapters 10-16) provides Application and Practice. Finally, the book concludes with Achieving Effectiveness as a Conflict Manager (Chapter 17). Each chapter provides concrete information regarding the various aspects of conflict management in the workplace with plenty of examples and illustrations to promote learning. In addition, each chapter includes the following features:
Performance Competencies: A succinct statement of what will be covered in the module.
Tools to add to your Conflict Survival Kit: Specific advice, activities, thought starters, challenges and pointers to aid the learner in applying what he or she has learned to real world contexts.
Performance checklist: Key points summarizing the basic content of the chapter.
Multiple choice: Five questions to test your knowledge.
Discussion questions: Two to four questions on issues relevant to the chapter to encourage in-class discussion and reinforce learning.
“To learn more…”: References and resources for individuals interested in exploring the chapter topic in greater depth.

In addition, at the end of many of the chapters, The Conflict Survival Kit includes exercises and cases to provide learners hands-on practice with handling conflict situations. Some cases involve scenarios for class discussion, written assignments, or self-instruction. Other cases involve role-plays intended for use in the classroom or seminar. Specific instructions are provided for each role-play. Role-plays can also be used as traditional case studies. Cases are built around a number of roles in a fictitious company that are profiled at the beginning of the book. To receive the full benefit of these cases, please become acquainted with this company and the characters before reading any of the cases.

Users who want additional practice and review can purchase the CONFLICT Participant’s Guide by visiting the Prentice Hall website at www.prenhall.com. Course instructors can request a CONFLICT Leader’s Guide by contacting their local Prentice Hall/Pearson representative or submitting a request on the Prentice Hall web site.

Enjoy your journey as you learn about managing conflict in your organization and workplace. With knowledge and practice, you will develop mastery in managing conflict and do more than survive as a manager. You will thrive.