

# **EIGHT SIMPLE RULES**

## **To Resolving Conflict and Improving Relationships**

By Greg Giesen

Managing conflict with coworkers doesn't have to be difficult. Below are eight simple rules that should both help you deal with conflict and improve your relationships at work.

### **Rule 1: Begin with the end in mind**

Our approach going into conflicting situations will greatly impact the outcome. There are many more positive outcomes available to us when we can see conflict as an "opportunity."

### **Rule 2: Stay off the ladder**

It is to our advantage, not to mention to the relationship in question, that we seek out all the facts, information and perspectives from all parties involved in a potential conflict before forming any opinions or taking any action.

### **Rule 3: Choose your style**

We need to think about the other person in the conflict and select an approach (or style) that can best create win-win outcomes. Our "auto-pilot" response to conflict may not always be the best approach in every situation or with every relationship.

### **Rule 4: Take the initiative**

Conflict is not about who's right or wrong; who's more at fault, or who should be the first one to apologize to the other. The truth is, if the conflict is bothering us, then it is ours to resolve. Waiting for the other party to come to us doesn't help us address the problem; it only prolongs it.

### **Rule 5: Focus "out" before focusing "in"**

Focusing "out" means understanding the other party's point of view before expressing our own. Why does this matter? Because it puts the other person at ease knowing that their concerns have been heard and validated. When people feel listened to and acknowledged, they have a tendency to relax and lower their defenses. This not only helps ease the conversation, but increases the likelihood that the other party will be more willing to hear our side of the story.

### **Rule 6: Know what you need**

There is more to conflict than an issue or disagreement. In most cases, there is an underlying need that is not being met or recognized. In order to fully resolve a conflict, we need to first identify the need that's not being met and then negotiate from there.

### **Rule 7: Manage the *how* and the *what***

Successfully managing conflict means having the ability not only to bring an issue to resolution but also to do it in a respectful, collaborative manner with the other party. In fact, with just a little preparation, you can ease the whole experience and set yourself and the other party up for success.

### **Rule 8: Empower the third side**

In a conflict, there's our side, there's your side, and there's the "third side." According to William Ury, author of *Getting to Peace*, the third side in a conflict is all the people who are directly and indirectly impacted by someone else's conflict. Although many *third-siders* see themselves as innocent bystanders, they actually have a tremendous influence on establishing a work environment that either supports constructive and functional conflict resolution or reinforces dysfunctional and destructive conflict resolution.