**Goals: This session should help the participant:**

- Recognize the need to deal straightforwardly with conflicts.
- Know how to handle personal conflicts and conflicts between employees.

**1. Interpersonal Conflicts Can Be Distracting and Disruptive**

Conflicts in the workplace may:

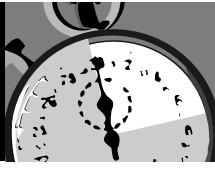
- Reflect strong disagreement on a specific issue.
- Result from different work styles or approaches.
- Develop due to competition (e.g., for a promotion).
- Stem from personal dislike or incompatibility.
- Have effects on work environment and productivity that extend beyond the individuals directly involved.
 - Other people may be forced to take sides.
 - Arguments, sabotage, and rehashing of past events can interrupt work.
 - Cooperation can erode and reduce productivity.

2. Avoid Letting Your Personal Conflicts Become a Problem

- Try to determine if you're causing the conflict for reasons such as:
 - Personal dislike
 - Competitiveness
 - Desire to get even
- Think about the conflict's negative impact on your own:
 - Productivity
 - Reputation
 - Ability to promote cooperation
- Back off from situations that could escalate the conflict.
- Try to deal with the person in an objective, professional manner.
- Be open to efforts to resolve or defuse the conflict.

3. Intervene When Employee Conflicts Interfere with Work

- Pay attention to how employees treat and react to each other.
 - Don't ignore conflicts or allow them to escalate.
- Talk privately with each employee involved in a conflict.
 - Explain that their conflict is disrupting work.
 - Allow them to describe their position and let off steam.
 - Don't allow insults or offensive language.
- Ask questions to identify the problem behind the conflict.



- Don't dismiss their concerns as foolish or irrelevant.
- Don't take sides.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Clarify that you and the involved employees agree on what the problem is.
- Encourage the employees to find a solution to the problem.
- Make it clear that your interest is a resolution that will remove the disruption from the work environment.

4. Take Action If Employees Can't Resolve Their Conflicts

- Meet with the employees involved in the conflict.
- Tell them their conflict is having an unacceptable negative effect on the workplace.
- Avoid taking sides unless you feel one person is completely wrong on an important issue.
- Ask the employees involved to propose "win-win" solutions.
 - Do not permit accusations, blame, or other negative responses.
- Try to gain agreement to a solution in which both sides give a little.
 - Put the agreement in writing, including specific employee actions.
 - Set a timetable to follow up on the agreement's success.
- Impose a solution, or ask a third party to impose a solution, only if the employees involved can't or won't.
 - If a solution is imposed, enforce it.
 - Explain any disciplinary action you'll take if employees don't keep the conflict from intruding into work operations.
 - Follow through on commitments, including disciplinary actions.

Applicable Regulations: None

Summary:

- When people come together, some of them are going to clash. When people feel under pressure, which is not unusual at work, such conflicts can get heated and spread. It's important to resolve conflicts before they get out of hand in order to have a reasonably cooperative, productive work environment.

Discussion Tips:



- Distribute copies of the handout and have participants read through the case study. Discuss how they would handle the situation, as well as the outcome presented.
- Ask participants to explain what they have done to resolve conflicts in which they were involved. Ask them not to name names.

Knowledge Review:



- Have participants complete the Handling Conflicts Quiz. It provides a useful review of their understanding of the subject.

Handling Conflict

CASE STUDY

The Case

Jack and Jill were supervisors at the XYZ Company, a small manufacturing firm. Jack was the company's most senior employee and believed that his way was the right way to do everything. For the most part, his way had been successful. Jill, a recent arrival from another firm, had also been successful—but with a much different approach to production. She was determined to prove herself on her new job and didn't intend to give in to Jack.

Disagreements between the two soon took in virtually every aspect of their jobs and were starting to get personal. Their employees were getting into the act, too—defending their own boss and belittling the other. Cooperation between the departments was replaced by bickering and finger-pointing. Product quality declined and productivity plummeted.

XYZ's operations manager told Jack and Jill to stop bickering and get some work done. They realized their conflict had hurt their performance and was threatening their careers. If you were Jack or Jill, what would you do?

Outcome

Jill went to Jack waving a white paper towel and calling a temporary truce. They agreed to try to list the topics on which they differed and compare notes the next day. When they did, they found the lists were surprisingly short. Each agreed to try the other's approach on one item for two weeks. They asked their manager to "witness" their agreement. They further agreed to try to keep out of each other's way and ask their employees to help them defuse the tension.

Two weeks of keeping their distance and not having their employees egg them on reduced a lot of the anger between Jack and Jill. And while they still each thought their own ways of doing things were better, they agreed to disagree. In areas where their departments had to work together, they agreed to let their manager select the approach. Though they never became friends, or even close colleagues, Jack and Jill found they could work together in a professional way.

Handling Conflict

HANDLING CONFLICT QUIZ

- 1. Interpersonal conflicts may reflect work differences, personality clashes, or competition.**
a. True b. False
- 2. Conflicts between two people at work are unlikely to have any impact on other workers or the workplace.**
a. True b. False
- 3. If you have a conflict with another individual, you should assume it's the other person's fault.**
a. True b. False
- 4. Dealing with people you don't like in an objective professional manner can help defuse conflicts.**
a. True b. False
- 5. When two employees have a conflict, their supervisor should ignore it.**
a. True b. False
- 6. When two employees have a conflict, their supervisor should immediately threaten them with suspension or discharge.**
a. True b. False
- 7. A supervisor should meet privately with employees involved in a conflict in an effort to understand the issue.**
a. True b. False
- 8. Employees should try to come up with resolutions to their own conflicts.**
a. True b. False
- 9. A supervisor should take sides in an employee conflict only when he or she feels it's a major issue.**
a. True b. False
- 10. When dealing with conflicts between employees, a supervisor should impose a solution only if the employees can't or won't.**
a. True b. False

Name: _____

Date: _____

Handling Conflict

ANSWERS TO HANDLING CONFLICT QUIZ

1. a. True.
2. b. False. Conflicts can spread to involve other employees and may harm workplace cooperation and productivity.
3. b. False. You should examine whether the conflict results from your personal dislike, desire to get even, competitiveness, or other negative emotion.
4. a. True.
5. b. False. The supervisor should be attuned to employee relationships and step in when a conflict emerges.
6. b. False. The supervisor should encourage resolution, turning to disciplinary action only as a last resort.
7. a. True.
8. a. True.
9. a. True.
10. a. True.