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CONFLICT RESOLUTION PHRASE BOOK

**2,000+ Phrases For Any HR Professional, Manager,
Business Owner, or Anyone Who Has to Deal With
Difficult Workplace Situations**



**BARBARA MITCHELL &
CORNELIA GAMLEM**
*authors of *The Big Book of HR**

“Hold your tongue, count to ten, be the bigger person are all band-aids when it comes to resolving conflict. *The Conflict Resolution Phrase Book* is a comprehensive guide to handling conflict in the best way for short-term and long-term effectiveness. It starts with the inception of the problem, all the nuances leading up to the crisis and how to turn conflict into a positive experience for all. If you truly want to maximize your effectiveness as a leader, this book is essential for your library.”

—Marna Hayden, chief game officer, Hayden Resources, Inc.

“Barbara and Cornelia take the fear out of managing conflict and difficult conversations. This is a wonderful toolbox of practical phrases, insights, and applications that will guide you through any conflict. As a mediator, I would love this to be required reading for all my clients. This book is a much-needed companion for anyone who manages conflict.”

—Adam Bowman, M.A., PHR

“*The Conflict Resolution Phrase Book* is a natural complement to *The Essential Workplace Conflict Handbook* because it helps us to focus on one of the most important aspect of conflict management...how to effectively use language. We can sometimes get sloppy with our communication during stressful situations and this will only exacerbate the conflict. Cornelia and Barbara provide a ready resource on how to talk differently to get different results when managing conflict. It is a must have for the manager or HR professional who know that *words* matter in today’s workplace!”

—Marsha Hughes-Rease, MSOD, PCC, CAPT/NC/USN/Ret.,
Quo Vadis Coaching and Consulting, LLC

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or Anyone Who Has to Deal With Difficult Workplace Situations

Barbara Mitchell and Cornelia Gamlem



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This book is dedicated to everyone who is conflict averse. We hope this will help you to find the right words and gain the confidence to speak up!

Acknowledgments

Writing a book is not an event; it's a journey. This journey began long before Career Press approached us with the idea. Throughout our respective careers, we've each have encountered people who and situations that provided inspirations for the phrases found in this book.

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How to Use This Book

Has this ever happened to you? You and a colleague see a work issue totally differently. You know you may only have one opportunity to share your opinion or solution, and when you try to say it, the words just come out wrong—so you don't say it at all. The result? Problems build up and workplace conflicts arise. Your relationship with the colleague suffers, you feel ineffective, and you both are less productive.

Sometimes you just need a prompt to help formulate your thoughts and help the words come out right. Although you can't plan for every conversation or confrontation, there are many times you initiate or anticipate a difficult conversation and that's where *The Conflict Resolution Phrase Book* can help you be prepared for whatever comes at you because preparation builds confidence.

None of us wants to go into a potentially difficult situation blind and be fumbling for words. Instead of shying away from such a conversation, you can use *The Conflict Resolution Phrase Book* to prepare for a difficult conversation or situation. Becoming familiar with phrases can spark a useful thought or give you the words you need to feel more confident and prepared.

Of course, you need to find your own words—words with which you're comfortable and feel right to you—and be in command of those words. The phrases in this book give you suggestions of positive things to say when you're initiating or responding to a difficult conversation. They will help you craft language to start a conversation. Drawing on these examples, you'll discover the right words for you to positively influence the situation or resolve a conflict. The right words empower you to stand up to conflict rather than run from it. The more you practice confronting and even embracing conflict, the stronger that habit will become and the less likely you'll be to flee from a difficult situation.

We firmly believe that resolving conflict in our virtual world has become increasingly difficult. That's why we highly recommend that, when you find yourself in a conflict situation, you do your best to resolve it face to face. If that's impossible, use Skype or Facetime so that you can at least see the person you're working with. Being able to observe body language and facial expressions as well as hearing tone of voice are critical to your ability to

expressions as well as hearing tone of voice are critical to your ability to understand where the other person is coming from and will help you resolve the conflict quicker. Please, under no circumstances attempt to resolve a conflict via email! It just can't be done, so don't even try.

This book is designed to be a resource for you when you need it. We don't anticipate you'll carry it with you into a difficult conversation but our hope is that, before you get pulled into a conflict, you've studied the phrases and questions in this book and maybe even practiced a few out loud to the point where they come to you naturally.

There's no right way to use the book. You could read it all the way through, but we think it makes more sense to refer to the chapter titles that most closely correspond to the issue you're facing. Use the table of contents and the index to guide you to the section/chapter you need at that particular moment in time, and we think you will be better prepared to handle whatever situation you find yourself in.

Though we've included a chapter of things never to say in a conflict situation, we hope you'll read it and take to heart that the phrases and questions in that chapter will do nothing to help you resolve a conflict so take them out of your vocabulary!

The Conflict Phrase Book is a natural complement to our book *The Essential Workplace Conflict Handbook*, which helps you to not only understand, but to manage and optimize conflict. Now you have a resource at your disposal to approach any difficult situation with the assurance that the words will come out right!

1

What's the Problem?

“If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about the solution.”

—Albert Einstein

Problem-solving is central to managing conflict, but the problem can’t be solved until it’s acknowledged and identified. Just as a physician must diagnose an ailment before treating it, so must the individuals involved in a conflict recognize there is a problem and identify its cause. Getting to the root cause of the problem requires an emphasis on fact-finding and asking good questions. The phrases in this chapter will focus on encouraging dialogue, asking good questions, and managing emotions.

Encourage Dialogue

In a conflict, it’s important to exchange information and points of view without becoming defensive or arguing. This exchange of information has to be a flexible, two-way conversation. It’s important that everyone involved participates and encourages reactions and suggestions. The following phrases can help you start effective dialogue: • I have a dilemma and I need some help with it.

- I need to talk through an issue with you.
- Something has been brought to my attention that I’d like to discuss.
- I need a reality check on something.
- I’m having a problem with [person/issue], and I don’t know what to do about it. I could use some advice.
- I’m trying to solve a problem, and before it gets bigger, I’d like to get your thoughts.

- You can talk to me about your concerns.
- I'd like to share an issue I really need help with and get your opinion.
- I hear what you're saying about [xyz].
- Let me repeat what you said so there's no confusion.
- I'm not sure that I agree. Let's explore that some more.
- From what you observed, this is how you're interpreting the situation.
- I'd like to know how you feel about it.
- Perhaps you could tell me about [xyz].
- What I think you are saying is [xyz].
- Sounds as if you really meant [xyz].
- You think it's a good idea if [xyz].
- You would really like it if [xyz].
- You think that [xyz].
- I'm so happy you said that because [xyz].
- Texting isn't the best way to communicate in this situation. When can we meet to have a discussion?
- You said that I don't have all the facts. Please tell me what I'm missing.
- You said that I don't have the right context for the situation. Can you provide it for me?
- I don't presume to know what you think. You'll have to give me more information.
- I know this is a frustrating situation for you, but if we are going to resolve it, I need to ask you some additional questions.
- I heard what you said, but I'm confused about your allegations. I need additional information.
- If I understand you correctly, [xyz].
- In other words, [xyz].
- From what you're saying, my sense is [xyz].
- It sounds like [xyz].
- So your main concern is [xyz].

- I really want to know more about your position on the issue. Can we talk and clear the air?
- I'd like to hear more about why you are so intent on going in that direction. Since we have different opinions, let's hear each other out.
- We need to talk about the email you sent last night. I'm not sure where you're coming from.
- What do you think would happen if we don't deal with this?
- We need to talk about why you oppose every idea I bring up. I want to understand if it's me or my ideas you don't like.
- Thanks for asking. That gives me a chance to share something that's been on my mind and maybe get your thoughts on it.
- I might be taking a risk, but I'd like to get your thoughts on what happened in the meeting today when you and I didn't agree on the [xyz] project.
- Can we talk about the issues with the project now, or would a time for later in the week be better?
- I understand you're frustrated with me. I'd like to share my thoughts and see if we can reach agreement on this.
- I'd like to know your thoughts about the discussion we had today in the café.
- How so?
- I'll say!
- Please say that again so I can process the words better.
- I take our discussions very seriously and really want to hear what happened.
- What just happened here?
- Thanks for being so open. I'm pretty sure that if we talk this out, we can resolve it.
- Thanks for bringing this forward.
- I totally agree with what you just said, so let's keep the conversation going.
- I know precisely what you said and agree with many of your points, but

would like to share my thoughts as well.

- I feel like we're on the same wavelength on this one with some minor exceptions. Let's talk.
- You're making some really valid points.
- Thanks for your honesty. Knowing your thoughts on this will help us move forward.
- I'm happy you brought this up.
- Getting this out in the open will be a first step.
- We all want the same thing: our [team, project, organization] to succeed. If we start from there, we can make it work.
- Is there anything else you'd like to add to this conversation before we move on?
- Is this what you need me to tell you?
- Have I answered your questions?
- What more can I share so that we can put this behind us?
- I'm so glad we're having this conversation.
- I've been waiting for the right time to bring this up and now seems right to me. Does that work for you?
- Please know that this isn't a game to me. I really want to have this discussion here and now!
- Let's keep our goal of having a strong working relationship in mind as we talk this over.
- I'm not going to downplay the challenges we face as we confront this issue, but I have confidence in our ability to work it out.
- Let's get all the issues on the table and tackle them one by one until we've resolved them.
- If we're going to get to the bottom this, we both need to commit to work towards a solution. We need each other to resolve this.
- I'll be glad to listen to whatever you want to share with me now or whenever you're ready to talk.
- Thanks for saying that. Helps me know where you're coming from.
- I wish you'd look at me when we're talking. It really helps me to connect

with you.

- Please ask me that in a different way.
- Did I answer your question? If no, what do you need from me?
- I trust you to keep this confidential so you can speak freely and openly.
- I promise I will keep this just between us. No one's going to hear about this from me.
- I am so glad you asked about that.
- Thanks for taking a risk and bringing up this issue. It needs to be discussed and I appreciate your bringing it to light.
- I know it cost you to say what you did and I appreciate it.
- This is just between us.
- Here's what I need to know.
- I think I know where you're coming from, but please tell me again what's important to you.
- You know what? This is the perfect time for us to talk about this.
- No time like the present to [xyz].
- You go first: what are you thinking? Then I will be happy to respond.
- Let me jump in here and ask a question [or clarify a point].
- I'm not just looking for a conversation. I want to get to the bottom of this!
- What are your views on [xyz]?
- What's your take on [xyz]?
- What are you thinking about [xyz]?
- It takes courage sometimes to speak up, so please let me know what you're thinking.
- Where can we go with what we know now?
- Let's hit rewind and start over.
- I think we both know that isn't the case, so how do we move forward?
- Something's just not right here.
- Feel free to jump in with whatever information you have on this issue.
- This is a topic I've wanted to discuss for a long time and now's a great

opportunity to do so.

- I think we both want the same thing here, so let's see if we can make it happen.
- I know we can resolve this, but it's going to take both of us! Let's get started.
- Is there at least one other way to look at this issue?
- What if we tried it this way?
- I'm willing to try it your way.
- That's a great idea.
- That is a wonderful suggestion. I can see how it will help us resolve this issue.
- I can see why this might be frustrating for you.
- That's a really good place to start.
- Sometimes just jumping in to an issue can break the ice. You want to give it a try, or shall I start?
- I love that you're so passionate about this. Tell me more.
- I'm really curious about where this is coming from.
- Let's look at the benefits of each of our ideas and see how we can come to agreement.
- There's a real chance that you see this very differently from how I see it. Let's figure that out.
- This is where I am on this at this point in time. Thought it might help you to know that today.
- I couldn't agree more and look forward to our conversation tomorrow.
- I have no problems with what you just said.
- I know exactly what you mean.
- You've outlined one way to look at this issue. Allow me to lay out the other side.
- There's more than one approach to take to resolve an issue, so let's look at some of them together.
- I would find it very helpful if you'd share your thoughts on this issue.

- I am sincerely hoping we can exchange views on this issue.
- How about we just get together and talk it out?
- It's always a pleasure when we have these open and honest discussions.
- I'm totally open to any and all suggestions you might have.
- This may not work, but would you be okay with opening up a discussion on the topic that came up in the staff meeting today?
- Can you tell me how you came to this conclusion?
- I'd love to know where this is coming from.
- I'll listen to any of your ideas if you commit to listening to mine!

Understand the Facts

If you're going to begin to resolve a conflict, you're going to have to really get inside the issue and probe for more information. Rarely will you have all the information you need to unravel the issues at the start, and you may have to use a variety of questioning techniques to gather the data so that you will be able to resolve the conflict—or at least start the resolution process. The following phrases might help:

- Don't jump to conclusions until you've heard all I have to say.

- Tell me what happened.
- Help me better understand.
- Did you tell anyone you would [e.g., be late for work]?
- Did you fail to do as you were instructed?
- Did you say that you called in sick on Monday or Tuesday?
- Do I understand that you [e.g., never received the document]?
- How many people [e.g., overheard the conversation]?
- On what date did you [e.g., receive that phone call]?
- What do you mean she has a poor attitude? Can you describe the behavior or give me an example?
- Why do you think that? Give me some specific examples.
- Describe the events leading up to [e.g., your manager screaming at the staff].

- How did you feel when he said that to you? What was your reaction to his statement?
- Please fill me in on the details.
- Can you give me a specific example of what happened?
- How would that work?
- Do you have a particular situation in mind?
- What exactly do you want me to do?
- Can you tell me the names of the people involved?
- Who observed the events?
- Who said [xyz]?
- Who responded first?
- What specifically did you see/observe?
- What did you do after [xyz]?
- What was your reaction?
- What was the reaction of others?
- What effect did this have on you/others?
- What did he/she say?
- What is the relationship between the parties?
- What were you and others doing when [xyz]?
- When did you first notice/realize/observe/become aware that [xyz]?
- When did the problem/situation/issue start?
- When did the meeting take place?
- When was the email sent/received?
- When did you have the discussion/meeting?
- How did he/she respond to the situation?
- How did you react?
- How often did this occur?
- How have you coped with/reacted to similar situations/behaviors in the past?

- How does that fit in with [xyz]?
- How has this affected you/others?
- How has this impacted the department/working relationships?
- Where did it happen?
- Where were you (or others) when this took place?
- When she said [xyz], how did he respond?
- Did I understand you correctly when you said [xyz]?
- Am I right in saying that [xyz]?
- Could you please expand on that last statement?
- Would you like to add anything else to that?
- Is there something else you could say about [xyz]?
- Is there some evidence that can support this?
- On one hand you say [xyz], but on the other hand you state [xyz].
- Fill me in on the details of the conversation that you had with [name].
- Did she explain why she gave you the specific answer?
- Did you ask him why he came to this conclusion?
- Did you tell him/her that you did not agree with his/her conclusion?
- Where is that happening?
- I'm not familiar with [e.g., the procedures in your department]. Can you review them for me?
- I'm not certain who [name] is. Does she work for [name]?
- Can you tell me who [names] are? I want to understand their roles in the issue.
- Would you like to talk about it? Tell me more about it.
- Is there anything else you'd like to say?
- Is there anything else I should know?
- Could you tell me more about [xyz]?
- I'm not sure I understand that word/acronym that you just used. Can you explain it?
- Give me a second to consider what I just heard you say.

- What exactly happened here?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What, if anything, could you have done to prevent this from happening?
- Who, besides you, was involved?
- Is there anyone who you think might back up your account of what happened if we need that?
- This is the very first time I've heard about what happened. Is there a reason you kept it from me until now?
- I heard what you said but I need more information.
- I need more information on what you just said. This is all new to me.
- What more can you say about this subject? Even a few details might help me understand this better.
- What's bothering you about this?
- I know this was upsetting, but what aren't you telling me?
- Do we have all we need to move forward on this? Let's take a break and gather some data?
- Let's start again and take it from the top.
- It seems to me that something's broken in the way we deal with each other. Can we discuss it and commit to resolving it, if possible?
- You've told me how you want to move forward, but I need both the "how" and the "why" to understand our next steps.
- Can we take a step back and try this again from the top?
- Let's get this all out on the table. Then we can work where we go from here.
- What are you not telling me that you think I need to know?
- I'm really anxious to get your side of the story.
- It will really be helpful to get your opinion on this.
- Please slow down and give me some additional facts.
- Please help me understand why you said that.
- Just a second. I'm not following you.
- Am I getting this right? What I think you said was [xyz].

- Would it help if I put my questions in writing?
- It would only take me an hour or so to capture my questions and email them to you. Will that work for you?
- Do you have any information I could read on this?
- What are some websites I could access to get more information on this topic? I am feeling underprepared for this discussion.
- Is there anyone else we should bring into this discussion to clarify the issues?
- Do you think we could table this discussion until morning? I think more clearly early in the day.
- This isn't at all where I thought this was going. Give me a second to wrap my head around what you just said.
- Walk me through it again, please.
- Why did this happen?
- Why do you think this happened?
- I feel as if I'm coming in on the middle of something here, so can we please start again from the beginning?
- Have you ever had this happen before and what was the outcome?
- I'm probably missing something really important here because I don't understand where you're headed with this. Can you try again?
- I know this isn't easy, but can you go over what happened again?
- Do you think we'd move this along if you sent me what happened via email?
- I can't read your mind, so please let me know your thoughts on this.
- Don't hold back. I want to hear what you think about this topic.
- I have one opinion and you have another. What can we do to find common ground?
- Let's think outside the box. What do we not know that we need to know? How can we get that information?
- Any chance we could take this in a different direction? Where we're headed doesn't feel right to me.
- Before we get to the solution, don't you think we should analyze the

issue?

- Is there any way we can resolve this issue with what we know now or do we need more information?
- What do we need to do to get past this?
- Maybe if we get away from the office, our issues might be clearer. How about taking a walk with me?
- If we really listen to each other, we can change this dynamic.
- What's different about this issue today that we didn't deal with last week when we talked? You may have had a change of heart, so let me know what's happening.
- Let's dissect what we know to find out what we need to add to our information base.
- Do you think we're remotely close to figuring out what's going on here?

Understand Underlying Perceptions

We've all heard the phrase *perception is reality*, and whether you believe that or not, to resolve a conflict, you're going to need to work hard to get inside the head of the other person. You have to understand what they perceive the facts to be. To do this, you need to continue to ask questions and/or paraphrase what you've heard them say so that you have a better sense of their position and how it differs from yours. Only when you fully understand their perception can the two of you take the first steps toward resolution. Here are some phrases to try:

- From the information presented, what makes you believe that [xyz]?
- Can you say a little more about how you see things?
- Tell me why this is important.
- How did you feel when she said that to you?
- What leads you to say that?
- What did you think when [xyz]?
- Why do you think that?
- Why do you think he/she acted that way/said that?
- Why do you think that happened?
- Why do you think they responded that way?

- Why do you think they reacted that way?
- Why are you bringing this to our attention at this time?
- When you say [xyz], what do you mean?
- What does [xyz] mean to you/the issue?
- What makes you think this?
- Could that be interpreted another way?
- Is that an interpretation or a fact?
- Is that logical?
- Do you think what you just said is consistent with what you said earlier?
- You claim you're [xyz], but yet [xyz].
- Why did you think he said that to you?
- Why did you think I wanted to have this [e.g., information/file]?
- What did you think would happen if you told him about the [e.g., delay/accident]?
- Why do you think replacing it would be a better solution than repairing it?
- How does this [e.g., policy] affect you?
- Are you concerned personally about the results?
- I'm not sure I understand. Could you repeat that?
- What are the facts underlying your [assumptions/opinions]?
- Why do you think that he said that to you?
- What did you think would happen if you told him about [xyz]?
- Would an objective observer in the situation agree with what you just said?
- Can you tell me why you think that it was wrong to [xyz]?
- What we have here is a failure to communicate.
- Why did you say that?
- What more do I need to know to understand how you feel?
- What haven't you told me that will help us move forward?
- Where is this coming from?

- How long have you felt this way?
- It would really be helpful for me to have your take on this subject.
- Is this something new or a long-standing belief that you've not shared with me before now?
- Was this an issue in your last job or is it something that happened here?
- I really am trying to understand your position on this, but it's not making sense to me.
- What are our options? You see it this way and I see it in a very different way. Now what?
- Yesterday you were okay about this, and today it's again a big issue. What changed?
- Help me understand why you're saying this.
- Help me understand why you feel this way.
- How strong is your position on this subject? Is there any room for compromise?
- Why now?
- I'd love to hear more about why you feel this way.
- It would really help me to understand where you're coming from if you could share why you feel that way.
- I need all the details and I need them now.
- I need as many details as you can possibly give me and I need them now!
- Share as much as is comfortable, but it's important that I understand where this is coming from and what the impact is on you and the organization.
- I think I'm beginning to get where you're coming from, but I do have a few more questions. Is now a good time to talk?
- Was there a precipitating event that I'm not aware of that got us to this point?
- Where did this start? When did this begin?
- Where do you see this situation going?
- What do you want to happen?

- I'm getting the impression that neither of us really understands what the problem is. Maybe we should do some data-gathering independently and meet tomorrow?
- Is there any chance this is just a misunderstanding?
- Any chance this came up because of semantics?
- Any possibility this has to do with the outcome of the game yesterday? I know you both are passionate about your teams.
- Let's go over the details one more time.
- It's human nature to go to the negative side of things, but we really need to stay positive if we're going to get this done.
- Somehow, you've made this all about you, and it really isn't. We're both involved in this conflict and we both need to contribute to the solution.
- I think we've learned a lot during the past year of working together. How can we apply what we know to solving our differences?
- I hope we're not over simplifying this issue, but I guess we'll see how it plays out.

Share Good Information

Resolving conflict is never a one-sided proposition. Both of you need to open up and provide data that can help illuminate your differences. The key here is to be as open and honest as possible so that the issues are clear and you can begin to resolve them. Here are some phrases to use: • What I observed [in the office/conference room] on [date] was [xyz].

- When I approached [name] to ask a question, he lashed out at me and said [xyz].
- There was an issue that came up [e.g., in the meeting] between [name and name], and I'd like to discuss it.
- When I said that he was [xyz], this is the particular situation I had in mind.
- We need a common baseline of facts and a willingness to admit new information if we're going to resolve this dispute.
- Let me give you some specific examples.
- I'd like to fill you in on the details.

- Here are some figures to back up what I just said.
- Here's what I think we should do about the situation.
- Here's what we're going to do about the situation.
- This is everything I know about it.
- Here's what I know about it.
- Maybe I can start again and give a few more examples to help us process it all?
- I've had experience with a situation like this, and here's what we did to resolve it.
- A trusted colleague shared with me how his organization handled a situation similar to ours. Want to hear about it?
- Here's a report I found on this topic that might move this along.
- I did a Google search and there's tons of information on this topic. Maybe we should pick a few articles and report back?
- There must be something in the files we can use.
- These are the facts as I know them.
- What I meant to say was [xyz].
- Let me say that again. It didn't come out the way I meant it to.
- I think I have everything I need on this topic.
- Here's a briefing paper I prepared for us to get us started.
- There's a lot here, so maybe we should take it in small pieces?
- Here's where I think we should start.
- I actually had this happen in my last company. Maybe we can learn something from that.
- I've put together a chronology to help us unravel this issue.
- Did I answer your question? If not, what else do you need from me?
- Was what I shared what you needed to hear? If not, what else can I tell you?
- I put together a spreadsheet with all the variables. Maybe this will help us think this through.
- Let's stop for a second so I can share some information.

- Since we last met, I've found out some things that I think are relevant. May I share them with you?
- What I said wasn't quite what I meant to say. Is it okay with you if I try it again?
- I'm so glad we're finally having this conversation. I've wanted to talk about this issue for a long time but didn't feel you'd be receptive.
- Let me try and put this as delicately as I possibly can so that we can take it from here.
- If there is something you didn't get, I am more than happy to go over it again.
- I welcome any and all questions so we're sure we are starting from the same place!
- Did I give you what you needed from me at this time?
- Is what I shared making any sense to you?
- I know it was a very long and involved answer, so if I need to go back, just let me know.
- Can I get back to you later on that?
- I should know more after our meeting next week so let me fill you in then. Will that work?

2

Listen Up!

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

—Stephen R. Covey

Listening is not waiting for your turn to talk! Before listening and communication skills can be honed, it's important to understand barriers to communication. The phrases in this chapter will focus on using active listening techniques and probes to ensure the listener has really heard the speaker, such as these:

- What we have here is a failure to communicate.

- You listened to what everyone had to say. You didn't interrupt or talk over them. That was very respectful.
- I answered that question and gave you examples, but you just zoned out when I started talking. Can we start over, please?
- People with diverse views can show respect for one another, especially if they listen to each other.
- I know you may be skeptical, but listen to all I have to say before you disagree.
- I thought you understood.
- You were listening carefully in the meeting, and when I asked if you understood, you said yes.
- You have to be willing to step into the unknown and listen to another point of view.
- No, that isn't what I said. Please don't put words in my mouth.
- I feel listened to when [xyz].
- I want to listen to everyone, so you can't all talk at once.

- I realize we're all excited about our own ideas, but we have to take turns talking and listen to each other.
- Listening to each other is the highest form of respect.
- Listening is the biggest compliment you can pay someone.
- May I finish this thought first?
- I'm not finished explaining why I feel this way.
- If we're going to solve this problem, it's important that we concentrate on listening to each other.
- Listen and understand the problem before offering solutions.
- Thanks, I did hear you the first time you said that.
- No need to repeat that. I heard it the first time.
- If you just need someone to listen to you, I'm here for you now and whenever you need me.
- Maybe you just need to talk it out.
- Talk it out; I will be your sounding board.
- Words matter.
- Listen with curiosity.
- Your critical tone makes it hard for me to process what you're saying. I immediately get defensive.
- When you tell me there's a problem, I immediately see a disaster because that's what my life has been like.
- My default is to go into problem-solving mode before I listen to your entire problem—I'm going to try to do better.
- I know that everything isn't always about me, but I have to work to not see life that way.
- Can you see how you might need to tone it down a little to get your point across?
- When you raise your voice, it reminds me of my eighth-grade teacher who yelled all the time and I was too scared to learn.
- Sorry, but I'm having trouble concentrating on what you're saying because you remind me of my ex-husband. I will try to put that out of my mind.

- Sorry, but I'm not as ready as I thought I was to listen to you now. Can we talk later?

Listen to Understand

If we're going to resolve any conflict, we must be clear on where our differences are. The best way to do that is to listen to the other person with great intensity to grasp what they mean. This is hard work and takes practice, but is a crucial part of conflict resolution. Paying attention to body language in face-to-face discussions is also important, as is listening for tone and inflection, especially if you're having a phone conversation. Here are some phrases to help you listen to understand:

- We learn by listening.

- I'm not certain you understood me. Let me repeat that for you.
- We can't talk past each other. Let's be sure we understand what the other is saying.
- I'm not sure you heard what I said.
- Could you repeat what you heard me say?
- No, no. That's not the question I asked. Let me say it again.
- No, no. Please answer my question. How do you [xyz]?
- You provided good information, but didn't answer my question. Let me ask it again.
- I'm listening.
- Please listen to me.
- Maybe I wasn't clear. Here's what I meant to say....
- Concentrate on what the other person is saying, not your impression of him.
- If you keep interrupting, how can you understand what she's saying?
- I don't think you heard what I just said. Let me try that again.
- Can we stop for a second for me to process what you just said?
- Give me a second to consider what I just heard you say.
- I hear you.
- I hear what you just said but I need some more information.

- I hope I'm not jumping to conclusions, but what I just heard you say was [xyz].
- If that's not what you heard, what more can I tell you?
- Was that what you needed to hear?
- You can't react to what you see or hear in the moment. Please listen to everything that was said.
- Remember, you aren't really listening if you're always talking. There's an old saying that we have two ears and only one mouth for a reason!
- Listening is not waiting for your turn to talk.
- The absence of talk is not the same as listening.
- When people present you with data and you don't listen, how do you think they feel?
- I want to understand your position, even if I don't share your belief.
- We have to listen carefully, especially when talking with people from different cultures, so there are no misunderstandings.
- Recognizing your own biases will help your ability to listen.
- That's not what I said. Maybe you're only hearing what you want to hear.
- Do you have any additional thoughts?
- Would you like to elaborate about your reasons?
- You heard what I said, but do you understand what I mean?
- I'm trying to follow your train of thought but I think I got lost along the way.
- Can you say that again? I think I missed something.
- I'm not following you, but it's probably me not paying as close attention as I should.
- Would you mind starting at the beginning? I promise I will listen closely.
- So glad we had this conversation. Now I have a much better sense of your thinking on this topic.
- I've blocked out all the noise around us to give you my full attention. I really want to hear what's on your mind.
- I'm trying to listen to more than the words you're using. I want to know

what's behind what you're saying.

- You can speak freely with me.
- I'm listening to your words and watching your posture and your face. I wonder if you've not yet said something that is critical to our resolving this issue.
- You've said you want to work with me but, when you fold your arms across your chest and glare at me, it sends a different message. Can we try that again?
- I'm listening and I really want to understand your point, so I have a couple of questions for you.
- I'm giving you my full attention so that I can really understand your thought process.
- I've heard what you said but I see this a little differently. Can I share my take on this?
- If we really listen to each other, there's nothing we can't overcome.
- I think by not listening to each other, we're not capturing the real issue.
- I hear you saying one thing but doing something totally different. The mixed signals are tripping me up.
- Listening takes concentration; let's move to a quieter place so I can really hear you.
- Actions speak louder than words, and there appears to be a huge gap between what I hear you say and your actions.
- This feels to me like we're in an alternative universe. Help me sort it out, please!
- Is there a way you could "bottom line" this for me? I'm trying to pick up the threads of conversation but would love to get to the end.
- I am really trying to listen with the intent to really hear you and your concerns.
- I firmly believe that the way I am going to understand you and the issue we're facing is to really listen to you.
- I really want to hear what you have to say but there's too much noise here. Can we move to another place or reschedule?

Ask for Clarity

When you find yourself in a conflict situation, you need to be sure you are totally clear on what's going on. This is not a step to ignore because you think you've got it all figured out. If done right, you can move toward resolution. Pay attention and probe for the information that will confirm the situation. Here are some phrases to try: • Okay. I think I know where you're coming from. Is this what you're telling me?

- I've said it before but I'm happy to say it again.
- Can we start this conversation over?
- Please tell me again so I'm sure I've got it.
- I hear you but I see this a bit differently from what you just said.
- Not so fast. Can you say that again?
- Please slow down and repeat what you just said.
- Just a second. I'm not following you.
- Please help me understand why you just said that.
- I'm just saying [xyz].
- So that we're clear, I heard you say [xyz].
- Am I hearing you correctly? Here's what I think you said: [xyz].
- Why did you say that?
- Why did you say it like that?
- Did I understand you correctly when you said [xyz]?
- Am I right in saying [xyz]?
- Would you clarify the point that you made about [xyz]?
- Regarding [xyz], why is that important to you?
- What makes you believe that?
- What do you think?
- Can you explain to me one more time why you think that [xyz]?
- Can we go over this again? There seems to be a contradiction.
- Please help me understand the difference between the two options.
- If I hear you right, you are saying that [xyz].

- Why did you phrase it that way?
- I need a little more information.
- You've given me a good start, but I think there is more that I need to know so I can contribute to this project.
- I don't understand what you just said and I really want to. Please start from the beginning.
- Is it okay if I stop you if I have a question?
- I heard what you just said but I see this situation in a different way. Maybe if you share a bit more of what you're thinking, we can reach consensus.
- It would be helpful to have more information starting with [xyz].
- I understood the first part of what you said but you lost me when you said [xyz].
- Not so fast! Please repeat what you just said.
- Sorry but this isn't making sense to me. Can we break it down into bite-sized pieces?
- I'm not following this discussion. Please give it to me again.
- Can we start from the top again?
- Please slow down. I'm having trouble keeping up!
- I feel as if I missed something along the way.
- Is it just me or do we need more information before we decide?
- Can you elaborate on what you just said? I need to put it in the context of what we were talking about yesterday.
- I'd like to back up and try that again.
- I'm giving you my full attention, but I think something isn't computing for me.
- Let's rewind and start over.
- Can I ask why you thought that was a good idea?
- I don't have a clue about what you just said.
- Can you give me a second to process what you just said?
- I don't think we're getting anywhere. Can we try a different approach?
- Please stick to the topic at hand.

- What are you trying to say here?
- I need to hear more from you in order to fully understand where you're coming from.
- Did I answer your question or do you need more information?
- I'm so glad we're having this conversation. This is really helping me understand the issues.
- Are we still talking about this? Didn't we resolve it in yesterday's meeting?
- Could you stop and clear something up for me?
- Sorry but can you expand that thought?
- I think I misunderstood your first point. Could you say it one more time?
- I really don't think there is a definitive answer to that question. Do you?
- I'm sorry to interrupt, but I really need to say something right here and now. We can return to your point in a minute.

Active Listening

Active listening is a powerful way to capture the entire message the speaker is attempting to convey. It encourages the speaker to talk and, therefore, to share more information because they feel heard. Active listening is not about agreeing with everything the speaker is saying, it's about listening in a non-judgmental way to gain a deeper understanding of their position. Active listening takes focus and concentration, but the pay-off is worth it. Here are some phrases to use:

- What happened to them?
- Can you give me an example?
- It seems like we're having a hard time being clear with each other. Can we start over?
- I appreciate your undivided attention. It lets me know you're listening to what I have to say.
- Every time you look at your [phone, watch, computer screen], you signal that this conversation is not important.
- So your main concern is [xyz].
- You look puzzled. Should I repeat that?

- You look excited. What do you want to tell me?
- What a smile on your face. What's up?
- What I heard you say was [xyz].
- This is what I think you said: [xyz].
- Here's what you said: [xyz].
- Is this what you said: [xyz]?
- I hope I'm not jumping to conclusions, but what I heard you say was [xyz].
- Tell me more about [xyz].
- How so?
- Just so we're clear, here's what I heard you say.
- That's very interesting. Go on.
- What happened next?
- Really?

Reflective Listening

When you're listening carefully and watching for non-verbal cues, you're acting like a mirror to reflect emotions you sense. These emotions, most likely, carry a great deal of the message the speaker is attempting to convey. Keep your questions and tone pitched at a low level so the speaker doesn't feel attacked. Here are some phrases to use: • As I understand it, [xyz].

- What you're saying is [xyz].
- If I could summarize, [xyz].
- Would that mean that [xyz]?
- Are you saying that [xyz]?
- Would that help with [xyz]?
- If that happened to me, I'd be upset.
- How did that make you feel?
- I suppose that must make you feel annoyed.
- That must have been satisfying.

- So from your point of view, [xyz].
- From what you've said, it sounds as if you're [angry/sad/overjoyed].
- If I heard you correctly, you think [xyz].
- It appears that you feel/believe [xyz].
- It sounds like you see it as [xyz].
- If I understand you correctly, you're saying [xyz].
- From your perspective, [xyz].
- What I hear you saying is [xyz].
- Am I hearing you right? You believe that [xyz].
- If I am hearing this right, you think [xyz].
- I understand what you said, but I'm not sure I agree with your interpretation of the facts.
- Can I think about it and get back to you later?
- Okay, let me be sure that I have things straight to this point.
- I understand you to say [xyz]. Is that correct?
- After talking today, it seems as if you think [xyz].
- Based on our conversation, I want to make sure that I understand that [xyz].
- It sounds as if you really believe that I don't want to work with you. Is that correct?
- I'm hearing that you think it would be a good idea for us to spend some time working on our differences. Right?
- If we tackle our failure to communicate, we may come up with some positive solutions!
- You said that you think our next step is to get the others involved. Is that right?
- I'm following what you're saying.
- I'm with you.
- I understand.
- I'm hearing a lot of pain in your voice, and I want you to know I understand.

- It sounds from what you're saying that what happened has deeply impacted your self-confidence.
- That's interesting. Can you tell me more about it?
- It sounds as if this is really impacting your work.
- So that we're clear, what I heard you say was [xyz].

3

Why Can't Everyone Be Like Me?

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.
If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

—Nelson Mandela

We're all everyday people who bring a vast array of differences and similarities to work—along with hopes, dreams, and problems. Learning more about each other—being genuinely curious—is key to working together. The phrases in this chapter can help address differences, confront stereotypes and assumptions, and start curious conversations, all in a manner that is respectful to all involved.

Differences Matter

Our differences are what make us unique and interesting. How boring the world would be if we were all the same. These phrases can open conversations about acknowledging and celebrating our differences:

- How do our differences impact our working relationships?

- What assumptions do we make based on our differences?
- We appear to be similar, and you assume we will have similar positions on this problem.
- We need to talk about that.
- Just because we share similarities, it doesn't mean we will always have the same opinions. Let's explore this further.
- Can you say a little more about how you see this situation based on your experiences?
- We obviously see this situation differently. Let's talk about our different perspectives so we can bridge the gap.
- What information might you have that I don't?

- I realize our different backgrounds cause us to see things differently. Let's talk about our different approaches.
- We've got a diverse group in this room. Let's avoid using jargon and acronyms. Not everyone may understand them.
- There seems to be a problem with the way you perceive your coworkers' work habits. Let's talk about the different ways you each approach work.
- If we're going to work together as a team, we have to recognize that we've all had different experiences and don't share the same perspectives.
- We have to recognize and respect our differences and differing points of view. It doesn't mean we have to all agree to everything.
- We all process information differently. Would we move this along if I put my thoughts in an email rather than having this conversation? That might be more comfortable for you.
- You never look at me when we're talking. Are you uncomfortable making direct eye contact?
- My/our background(s) are who we are/I am. There should be no need to bury my/our [religion/ethnicity, etc.].
- Regardless of our differences, we've got to work together for a common goal.
- Listening to what each other has to say is important, especially because we all come from different backgrounds and bring different views.
- A big strength comes from learning from people who are different that we are.
- We don't always agree, but it would help the situation if we talked about our differences.
- I'd like to take this approach: Allow me to tell you what I think and why, then you can do the same. Will that work for you?
- Our differences are fascinating.
- We all come from different areas and backgrounds with different cultures. Our strength is the varied ideas we bring from those differences.
- The more we're different, perhaps the more we're the same. We all want the same thing: a positive work environment.
- We have such diversity in this workplace. Let's continue to celebrate those

differences and enjoy each other.

- Some of the staff may seem distant, even aloof. It's because they are not used to a collaborative approach.
- You have to recognize that the staff has many individual and collective accomplishments. You can't talk down to them.
- We often communicate with people from different cultures. We have to listen carefully so we understand their concerns.
- Be sensitive. They may be having difficulty (are uncomfortable) saying what they means.
- Be aware of your own biases. They may interfere with what you see and hear.
- I guess I was just looking at it from my point of view. I shouldn't have said what I said.
- Don't underestimate anyone based on their background, experiences, or even age. We welcome new and diverse perspectives.
- Our differences are not problems. They're strengths.
- Let's not let our cultural differences restrict us.
- We have differences, yet there's much we have in common. That's what brings us together.
- Paraphrasing the old saying, until you've walked a mile in their shoes, you can't understand their issues.
- No matter where we're from or our other differences, we share a passion for our work.
- One of our guiding principles is that we value each other—no matter our differences.
- I'm doing my best to understand our differences but I need you to help me.
- As we start working together, let's all come together in the spirit of tolerance.
- I don't think either of us wants to see our differences get in the way of our working relationship. Any ideas on where we go from here?
- Can we find ways to minimize our differences and do some great work together?

- I'm trying not to let our differences influence me but not sure I'm succeeding. Can we talk about it?
- The work can't be about our differences. We must come together!
- I'm thinking that our similarities make us comfortable with each other but our differences make us interesting to each other.
- I'm even more committed than ever to finding ways around our differences.
- I value you and what you stand for, so can you forgive me for what may be perceived as an insensitive remark?
- Though we come from different places, we share a passion for our work. Let's build on that.
- I really want to learn more about you and your background so that we can get past the issues we've been having.
- Tell me about growing up in your country, and I'll share my experiences. The more we know about each other, the better!
- Different people see things in different ways. Let's see what we have in common.
- I totally respect you and want to know more about you.
- This situation is a perfect example of why we need each other.
- I really don't want our differences to get in the way of our success. I want to minimize them to create something wonderful.
- Put yourself in my place. How would you feel if people only saw you for the color of your skin?
- You have such a different perspective on this, and I really want to hear what you have to say.
- Your background and interests have provided you with such a wonderful take on life. I want to hear more about why you think the way you do. I'm not judging; I'm wanting to learn!
- We can have opposing ideas and still respect each other.

Confront Stereotypes and Assumptions

Although changing other people's beliefs may not be possible, addressing behavior that's not respectful is something we can all do. It's important to

address stereotypes and assumptions. Here are some ways to do so without sacrificing civility:

- Let's be careful not to make assumptions about new team members just because they appear to be different from us. We may be stereotyping an entire group of people.

- I've got a problem with the joke you told earlier.
- Comments like the ones you made earlier are offensive and derogatory. They are not appropriate and they embarrass everyone in the group.
- Today in the meeting, when you called me a girl rather than a woman, it made me feel as if you believe women can't contribute.
- Using derogatory words to refer to other people is offensive and embarrassing for everyone in the workplace.
- I overheard the comments you made about [coworker]. You sounded frustrated and angry, and I'd like to talk about that.
- I'm concerned about some of the comments that I heard you make regarding [coworker]. It sounds like your opinions are becoming broad generalizations.
- I need you to avoid negative stereotyping in the future.
- There have been a number of jokes and comments made recently that have racial overtones. This behavior causes resentment and disrupts the work environment.
- Jokes that mock other individuals are difficult to take as funny. They don't belong at work.
- Please listen and let me explain my fear and frustration when I hear jokes/remarks about other people, like the one you just made.
- Provoking and challenging our most dearly held assumptions helps us to see another point of view.
- I can accept valid viewpoints that are different than mine, but what you just said is bigotry and it isn't valid.
- If we're divided, we're vulnerable. Let's work together.
- We all benefit from a new perspective. Listening to each other will help.
- Saying that a man can accomplish more than a woman can is an unacceptable stereotype.
- That's a stereotype, and it's unfair.

- I find what you just said offensive.
- These are other human beings you're talking about. Would you say that to their faces?
- How would you feel if someone said that about you?
- We're all individuals. We're not a representative for everyone who shares our [gender/race/faith/national origin/etc.].
- Stop putting other people down and having "fun" at other people's expense. It isn't fun at all.
- Words do matter. Think about what you want to say and the message it conveys before you say it.
- Biased statements like those breed fear. We need to be establishing trust.
- When we view each other through filters—race, gender, or some other characteristic—stereotypical thinking may occur. That won't help us resolve the conflict.
- We need to speak to each other based on our interests in this situation, not based on characteristics such as age or gender.
- I'd be careful telling those jokes, especially at work. If I found it offensive, so will other people.
- You said, "Maybe I shouldn't tell this joke, but...." If you don't think you should be telling a joke, then don't.
- You may enjoy that type of humor among your friends, but at work, not everyone appreciates it.
- I don't get it. Why is that joke/comment funny? I heard a put-down of an entire group of people, not humor.
- Playful and heartfelt humor is welcomed, but once humor crosses the line and offends others, it has to stop.
- I couldn't help overhearing the comment you made about [name] and I'm concerned. Why don't we talk about it?
- When we/you make generalizations about a group, we/you fail to see and appreciate the individual.
- Once we recognize that we all carry biases, we can talk about how we can think and act differently. It's an opportunity to understand and respect our differences.

- I have a feeling that just because I grew up on a farm, you think I don't understand issues facing the people in the inner cities.
- Just because I have a Spanish surname doesn't mean I don't speak your language.
- I know we sound different to each other because neither of us was born in this country, but I'm pretty sure we agree on a lot more than you might think.
- You're the first person I've met from your part of the world, so please help me understand more about you and your country.
- Wow! Look around this table and see the different faces that representing many different cultures. This can give us an edge as we work together.
- How can we take our various backgrounds and strengths and maximize our effectiveness?
- I'm so grateful that we have different strengths. Makes our team even stronger!
- I can feel your negative reaction to our differences and it's making this conversation more difficult than it needs to be. Can we find a way to meet half-way? I'm willing to take the first step.
- I'm guilty of making assumptions about people I don't know and I want to do better at that. I think you can help me.
- Please give me a chance to prove to you that, just because I am different from you, I still have something to offer to this project.
- I'm trying to understand you, but our many differences appear to be getting in the way. Let's start by sharing something we value and see where we find similarities.
- You have a tendency to speak loudly and people think you're yelling. Do you think that if you lowered your voice that you might get some people to see it your way?
- I think you've made an assumption about me based on my gender. I hope you can see past that and see me as a valued colleague because that's how I see you.
- At our team lunch yesterday, you told a story that had everyone laughing. It bothered me at the time, but I didn't want to be a "wet blanket." I just wanted you to know that I was offended, but I don't want to make it a big

deal with the rest of the group.

- You've been asking me a lot of questions about my religion, and at first I was flattered. Now I learned you are telling other people that I belong to a cult. My faith is important to me, and I need you to stop asking me about it unless you have a serious question or need clarification. It's not a joke to me.

Respectful Curiosity

Having a curious conversation with someone has to be organic and genuine. Here are some phrases that can open dialogue and help to get to know each other:

- I grew up in a different time (decade) than you. I'd love to hear more about your experiences.

- What you just said reflects grace and dignity, and reminds us that we have more similarities than differences. Let's get to know each other better.
- I spent my childhood growing up in the city and that shaped my views. I'm interested in learning about your background.
- Do you mind telling me a little bit more about [xyz]?
- I'd really love to know more about [xyz].
- You seemed uncomfortable in the staff meeting today when I praised your work. I didn't mean to embarrass you. How do you like to be recognized?
- We're going to be spending a lot of time working together on this project. It might be helpful if we take some time to learn about each other.
- We probably have more in common with each other than we think. For example, what type of car do you drive?
- I've never known anyone who was raised in another country. I'd like to learn more.
- We know what each other does at work, but I'd like to know about your life outside of work. What are you passionate about? What do you worry about or laugh about?
- I'd like to know more about you—the person behind the professional. Where did you grow up?
- My family traveled and moved around a lot during my childhood. I never got to know my extended family. How about you?

- Have you always lived in the same place?
- What's your favorite place of all the places you've traveled or lived?
- Why did you decide to study that [subject/major or at that school]?
- Why did you decide to work in [finance, engineering, marketing, etc.]?
- If you could do another job or become expert at something else, what would it be?
- What was the best/worst job you ever had?
- What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
- If you had more time to spend outside of work, how would you spend it?
- What was the biggest challenge of your childhood (or the biggest challenge you ever faced)?
- I've been fortunate to have some professional accomplishments, but my greatest legacy is [e.g., my children]. What do you want to be remembered for?
- As a child, what was your favorite pastime? Mine was [xyz].
- What was the most interesting experience you ever had?
- Out of our differences, we can find some commonalities. Can we talk about how we're alike?
- People with diverse views can show respect for one another, especially by listening to each other.
- We come from different backgrounds and perhaps we don't know enough about each other. What can we do to become more familiar with each other?
- Someone from a rural background, such as you, will see the world differently than someone like me from an urban background. Neither of us is wrong within our own sphere of experience. I'd like to understand more about your experiences.
- When I first met you, I thought you were standoffish because [xyz]. Now I realize you're not. We should get to know each other better.
- I didn't mean to be offensive or make you uncomfortable when I acknowledged your work this morning at the department meeting. How would you like your achievements recognized?

- Would you mind telling me [xyz]?
- I'd really like to know more about [xyz].
- The biggest difference in this [organization/country/team] and one that is hard for me to adapt to is [xyz].
- One thing I'd like to share about the culture I was raised in is [xyz].
- There's a big difference between the way certain things are done here and what I'm used to. Can you help me understand why you do these things this way?
- The more we know about each other, the more we can help each other and be effective contributors to the [team/organization].
- Would you like to go to lunch today? I'd like to get to know you better since we're going to be working so closely together.
- How did your family enjoy the trip you took last month?
- Do you enjoy sports?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- I'm really curious about why you feel that my comment was in any way related to where you grew up. Can you elaborate on that so we can move forward?
- I've lived my entire life in this town and you've lived so many places. What's that like?
- I grew up in a very closed community where pretty much everyone looked the same and went to the same school and the same church. While it was a nice way to grow up, it really didn't prepare me for the way the world is today.
- I'd love your take on things I can do to expand my thinking about other religions, cultures, and lifestyles!
- You're new to our country and I've never left it—even for a vacation—so I'd love to hear what brought you here.
- Shame on me—I don't even own a passport and you've already lived and worked in three different countries. What makes you so willing to take the risk to move to another country?
- It can't be easy to start a new job in a new country. What's that like? I've

lived in this town almost my whole life, so I am in awe of someone who's taken risks like you have.

- I'd love to hear more about why you came here and what's it been like for you.
- Change is sometimes uncomfortable. Are you finding that to be true as you work to become part of this community? How can I help?
- I respect you and would love to know more about you.
- Is now a good time to talk about our differences and our similarities?
- We've worked together for more than a year and I really don't know much about you. Where did you grow up? Do you have any siblings? What did you love to do when you were a kid?
- I went to a small college in a big city and that was a good combination for me. Why did you choose to go to your alma mater and how it worked for you?
- I just read a study that said that first born children frequently have higher IQs than their siblings. I am a middle child; I wonder what that means for me? How about you? Where are you in birth order?

What Happened to Team Spirit?

“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.”

—Henry Ford

Working in teams is a given in today’s knowledge economy. People’s jobs are interdependent on those of others and collaboration is critical. Team leaders and team members all have a responsibility to make the team work. This chapter includes phrases that will help team members work together to build and nurture a strong and successful team.

Form a Team and Establish Trust

Most of us have been raised to be independent. We’re rewarded for individual accomplishments—work hard and get good grades in school, for example. All that changes when teams form and you have to put trust in other people. Start building trust with honest discussions among team members with phrases such as these:

- It’s good that we’re questioning each other. It can lead to creative ideas.

- Conflict is not a bad thing for the team. We’re going to have different ideas. We need to decide how to approach our differences.
- If we acknowledge up front that we’ll have differences, we won’t be afraid to discuss them.
- We all handle conflict differently. Can we each explain how we approach conflict so we have some common ground?
- We each have something unique to contribute and that’s key to problem-solving.
- I sense you’re having difficulty with what I’m saying. Can I clarify anything for you?

- I guess we don't agree on this issue. Maybe we should find out why.
- Assumptions are risky. Make them only when you have to.
- I'm most frustrated in this group when [xyz].
- What I like best about being on this team is [xyz].
- I feel part of this team when I (or others) [xyz].
- I feel left out on the team when [xyz].
- One of the smartest things we've done as a team is [xyz].
- We may have all the correct facts and figures, but it doesn't matter if we can't build trust.
- As a team, we have to be open to hear other views and invite everyone to share theirs.
- We should talk about our communication styles so we don't make assumptions and misunderstand each other.
- I'm aware of the frustrations the team is experiencing. Can we all commit to addressing and resolving them?
- The process will move faster if we all work together. What's preventing us from doing that?
- Before we make assumptions about each other, it would be good to learn more about each team member.
- Group harmony is important, but we also need to agree that discussing problems is also important.
- Working through this problem together surfaced issues and helped improve the way we work together.
- For some of us on the team, group accomplishments are more important than individual ones. Please, no bragging.
- How inclusive are we of differences on our team?
- How do our differences enhance the team?
- Differences—different styles or backgrounds, for example—bring new perspectives to the team.
- Do our differences ever cause conflict?
- How can we lessen any negative effects of our differences?

- As we talked through these issues, it was clear that we had the best interests of each other and the project in mind.
- It's important that we trust each other so we can discuss ideas and make decisions.
- Everyone here is an important part of the team. We'll treat each other with respect and dignity.
- Arguing among ourselves will compromise the integrity of each individual and the integrity of the team.
- We won't tolerate behavior that undermines another colleague. We work as a team here.
- There's no room for self-promoters on this team.
- I really want this team to be successful.
- Everyone on this team has a role to play.
- Each member of the team is critical to our success.
- We want our work together to be easy and hassle free.
- We're all in this together.
- We need to connect in a new way so we can move forward.
- You're either on this team or you're not.
- We're stronger together!
- Everyone on this team brings something to the table. Let's figure out how to work together to get the job done.
- Let's take a few minutes to get to know each other. I'll start and share a little about my background, and then we'll go around the table so you all can do the same.
- Let's focus on the mission of this team. Why are we here together at this time?
- Let's set some ground rules for how we work together.
- One of our guiding principles must be that each person here has a right to be heard.
- What else do you think we should have as guiding principles?
- Great, effective teams just don't happen; it takes work!

- How can we maximize our strengths to work together?
- There will be times when we have to make sacrifices for the team. How does that feel to you? Are you committed to what we have to do—even if it means changing your schedule?
- What does being on this team mean to you? What do you think you bring to the team?
- We all can't be good at everything so we need each other's skills and strengths to balance us out.
- Mutual trust is the foundation of good teamwork.
- If we can't trust each other, we may need to discuss why and find ways to build our mutual trust.
- I value each one of you on this team for your skills and what you bring to the team.
- What just happened is a great example of exactly why we need each other!
- Our strengths complement each other. We're going to be a great team!
- If we're ever going to resolve this, it's going to take the entire team.
- Teams have to trust each other, have a common purpose, and know that together they can accomplish so much more than anyone on the team could do on their own.
- I've heard that team members who trust each other are more likely to share information with each.
- It will really make a difference on this team if we take some time to get to know each other as people. This is how trust is built.
- Team members must be able to depend on each other.
- I want us to be the kind of team that trusts each other and shares information. That's how we'll meet our goals. Let's take the first step today.
- Opposing ideas lead to creativity and are good for the team/organization.

Establish Goals and Guidelines

One of the most important thing that a team can do is to establish rules of engagement or set guidelines. Taking time to do this step will help to ensure that all members work together effectively and, as much as possible, avoid conflict.

When everyone on the team is focused on the desired outcomes and knows what is required to have a successful conclusion to the project or the work, conflicts can be minimized. Here are some phrases to use: • I don't see how we can accomplish everything within the time frame you're proposing.

- I'm glad you shared that point. It will help all of us on the team identify a better solution.
- Before we set project goals, can we agree that we'll treat each other as individuals and respect what we will each contribute?
- Something I'd love to see this team accomplish is [xyz].
- What are some of the things that block us from reaching our goals?
- What are the accomplishments we want to be known for (and/or proud of)?
- We're not making progress on this project. We need to set some goals.
- Let's prioritize all the tasks by due dates and importance so we don't disagree later.
- What do you think is the best way to assess tasks/action items?
- Our priority has to be to pull together and finish this project, but first we need to resolve some of the issues that are getting in the way.
- Setting too many goals may prevent us from meeting any of them. That will cause us all to become frustrated.
- Let's look at our mission and decide what it is we want to accomplish.
- When we know what we're being asked to deliver, then let's put some goals in place.
- What's this project all about, anyway? If we're unclear as to what we're to do, let's bring in someone who can answer our questions so we get off to a good start.
- Let's put some milestones so we stay on track.
- How will we know we're successful?
- How will we measure whether we've met our goals?
- Let's be honest about why we're here. Our task is to [xyz].
- Do we have all the information we need to get started?
- How will we celebrate when we're successful?

- What can we do to ensure that new team members know and understand our team's guidelines?
- Do we have any informal guidelines that you feel we've been following and that work well?
- We don't want to overwhelm ourselves with too many guidelines. If we do, the important ones might be forgotten.
- Let's agree that we'll explain written rules to new team members so there's no confusion. We can avoid disputes that way.
- Can we establish ground rules for resolving conflicts?
- We're not sharing information effectively. We need to set some guidelines.
- What are some of the obstacles we face and how can we overcome them?
- One of the biggest mistakes we made as a team is [xyz]. What can we do to avoid somethings similar in the future?
- Let's establish guidelines so we all know what to expect and what's expected of us.
- We've encountered some problems. Could we solve them (or avoid them in the future) if we establish clearer guidelines?
- What guidelines could we establish to help [e.g., meetings run more smoothly, communications to be stronger]?
- We have to agree to listen to other team members first, then decide how to respond.
- It's been quite some time since these guidelines were established. Perhaps we should review them to make sure they are still relevant.
- It's important to recognize that everyone has an opinion about almost everything; we should acknowledge differences of opinions.
- Disagreements are inevitable; let's do our best to be non-judgmental.
- As team members, we need to hold each other accountable.
- Clarify where your responsibility starts and stops, and how it fits with that of other team members.
- Update people who need to know what you do.
- When in doubt about anything, it's important to seek clarification.

- Each of us has fears and even weaknesses. We have to acknowledge them.
- We have to be comfortable being open with each other.
- If you have an issue with another team member, tell them, not others.
- If we all provide input, we'll be able to commit to the decisions we make.
- We can't avoid disagreeing with each other because it makes us uncomfortable.
- Can we agree that we'll all participate in important discussions so we can make a decision?
- If you don't express an opinion, we'll interpret it as agreement.
- There's no room on the team for holding a grudge. Let's agree to be honest about our differences.
- Let's agree to speak simply and honestly about the situation.
- It's important that we agree not to hold our opinions back on important issues. They all deserve to be heard.
- We have to agree that we will all be able to provide input, ask questions, and understand the reasoning behind any idea before we make a decision.
- Can we agree that if any of us get stuck, we'll come back to the group to brainstorm possible solutions?
- We've had new members join us, and we all have differences in the way we communicate. This is a good opportunity to talk about our preferences and differences.
- All decisions and conclusions will be reached collectively.
- Everyone has equal input on this team. It's important that everyone contributes.
- If discussions get heated, can we agree that we'll take a break, cool off, and look at what's going on before the issue gets out of hand?
- Remember we agreed to acknowledge our differences and not jump to conclusions.
- We each bring a different type of support to the team. It's important that we learn from each other.
- Being a member of this team means that we'll each contribute to the team goals as well as share different ideas, perspectives, and expectations.

- We all have to accept responsibility for playing a role in resolving any conflicts.
- When we're in meetings, let's put away our devices and listen to each other.
- We'll work as a cohesive unit. Although we can disagree, there's no room for dissention and in-fighting.
- As a team, we value collaboration. We'll work through our differences.
- It's okay to have robust discussions and competing points of view as long as they are debated in a respectful way.
- When something happens that we haven't anticipated, we'll discuss it right away.
- We'll talk about any challenge that occurs when it occurs so no one becomes frustrated.
- We'll check in regularly with each other.
- How often do we want to meet?
- Who calls a meeting?
- What time of day should we meet?
- How long do we want the meetings to be?
- Who puts the agenda together?
- How soon before the meeting will the agenda be distributed?
- Will we have input into the agenda?
- How soon after the meeting will minutes be distributed?
- What about confidentiality? Are we going to keep what we talk about in this room?
- Anything we talk about as a team stays with the team.
- What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas!
- How will we deal with team members who don't participate or who are missing or late all the time?
- We will commit to listening to each other's positions—even when we don't agree.
- We honor each person's right to present their opinion and the right of the

other members to disagree.

- I'm glad you agreed to be a part of the team. We can use your expertise in [xyz].
- One strength I bring to the team is [xyz].
- Your skill set and knowledge are important for the team. Can you give us your best?
- What strengths do we each bring and how can we use them on the team?
- We all come from different departments and do different types of work. What an opportunity to understand, listen to, and learn from each other.
- We've asked her to join the team because of her expertise/experience with [xyz].
- We'll agree on roles and responsibilities so everyone is clear about what they have to do.
- Can we walk through each team member's responsibilities so everyone's clear about what the others are doing?
- Was a team lead appointed by leadership or do we get to pick?
- Are we going to rotate chairing meetings?
- Who will determine people to invite to each meeting?
- Who will send out the agenda?
- Who's responsible for making the room arrangements?
- Who will take minutes?
- What role do you want to play on this team?
- When do we need to report out and to whom?
- Who will take our questions forward for responses?
- Are we all equal on this team or is there a hierarchy we need to adapt to?
- Forget titles here. On this team, we're all equals.

Brainstorm

Teams are formed to bring people together to work on a project or issue that needs resolving. Each individual brings their own ideas and perspectives. Everyone has a different approach. This leads to conflict and creativity.

Brainstorming is an excellent process to make sure all these differences are heard, and here are some phrases that will support this process:

- Communicating through technology is probably second nature to you, but to others it's a distraction. Let's figure out what will work for everyone.
- What is the specific situation/behavior that's problematic for the team and how can we address/solve it?
- What effect is this problem having on our relationships with each other and our ability to meet our goals?
- What solutions can we suggest in terms of specific procedures, systems, or steps? What are their benefits to the team?
- What opportunities can we create for team members to learn from each other?
- Everyone's thoughts and ideas are vital to this project. It's important that everyone speak up.
- I think we understand each other's position. That's a big step forward.
- What we need on this team is the opportunity for each of us to share our creative ideas.
- The strategies you're shared are very interesting. Do you have any suggestions on how we can plan the implementation in order to ensure our success?
- Some good suggestions have been made that make a great deal of sense, but where do we start?
- Are our goals for this project still realistic or do they need to be redefined?
- There seem to be some barriers getting in the way of our progress. Any ideas on how to address them.
- We should go around the room so everyone can give input.
- Our decisions are important, so I'd like the team to think through all possible scenarios and solutions.
- Can we look at some "what if?" scenarios?
- Whatever decision we make, can we agree to implement some check points along the way?
- We're on a tight deadline, and things are starting to break down. Let's take a break for a few minutes and then share some ideas?

- We have a great deal of synergy on this team, and we're all problem-solvers. How can we best tackle this situation?
- We seem to be floundering as a group and we need to re-focus. What remedies can we implement to get us back on track?
- What can we do to make sure we don't find ourselves in this predicament again?
- No side comments among each other. They are disrespectful to whomever is speaking.
- That's a new approach.
- I don't think I would have thought of that option. Thanks.
- That's a different way to look at it.
- What would we have to do to implement this approach?
- Can we alter the process or change the specifications?
- Is it possible to break this down into more doable tasks?
- Can we use different criteria to judge the resolution?
- Let's focus on what's working and how we can leverage it to address this concern.
- Remember: There are no bad ideas in brainstorming.
- Let's go around the table and everyone add something to the list.
- After we get as many ideas up on the wall as possible, then and only then will we start to prioritize them.
- Think of how you could add something to an idea presented by a coworker.
- This is not a competition. Our goal is to solve a problem or come up with a new idea.
- Please speak openly; we're in this together!

5

You Want Me to Do What?

“The enemy of accountability is ambiguity.”

—Patrick Lencion

Just like the producer of a play provides a script to the actor to communicate what’s expected, so must leaders communicate and manage expectations to colleagues, associates, and teammates so everyone knows what success will look like. The phrases presented in this chapter will focus on communicating clearly defined roles and responsibilities as well setting and managing expectations, and providing feedback.

Set Expectations

One of the greatest sources of conflict is unmet expectations. Yet, many managers either don’t set clear expectations or don’t communicate them to their employees. By setting clear expectations early so that everyone starts out on the same page, you can avoid future conflicts. Here are some appropriate phrases to use:

- I want to talk to you about how your job fits into the bigger picture—the role of the department and the mission of the organization.

- Let’s review some tasks that are part of your job.
- These are some things we don’t expect, nor do we want you to do.
- When we meet to review the department procedures, I’ll also explain why they are in place.
- You’ve had a chance to review the job description, but there’s more information I’ll share that will clarify your daily job responsibilities.
- Project evaluations need to be turned in within two business days of a project’s completion. If there’s a delay, [explain what happens].
- If you can’t complete the report on time, let me know as soon as possible

so we can make any necessary adjustments.

- Each report has to comply with a certain format. I'll go over the format with you and tell you where you can find more information about it.
- Customer relations is critical. It's important that we greet every customer and make an attempt to learn [and call them by] their names.
- We need to increase sales by 10 percent this fiscal year, with 5 percent coming from new accounts.
- This is how we measure success in your job: [e.g., all calls are answered by the third ring].
- These are our values and the behaviors that reflect them. We have no tolerance for any type of disrespectful behavior in our workplace.
- If our customers/clients/patrons express any concerns that you can't address, bring those concerns to me or any other member of management.
- If there is something you don't understand about your job, please let me know as soon as possible so I can explain it.
- Complaining isn't going to solve any problems. It's important that issues are addressed early. I welcome hearing your concerns.
- I may set the guidelines about necessary actions, but I take a collaborative approach about how we get there.
- I'm direct when discussing what needs to be done. That doesn't mean I don't value your feedback.
- We clearly define all tasks and set definite time limits for completing them. This reduces guesswork and frustration.
- These are the performance objectives for which you and the department will be held accountable.
- There are often short time frames given to complete certain projects. That's one of the reasons we always establish a time line for each task.
- If something interferes with meeting a deadline, please notify me right away so the proper action can be taken.
- This department/team values collaboration.
- Feel free to always ask questions and get help from others. I also expect that you'll answer questions and get help.
- You can bring any concern to me, but if I'm not available, here are some

other people you can turn to.

- Never be afraid to ask questions. It will save time and avoid mistakes.
- We've established guidelines for the department so everyone knows what's expected. I'll let you review them before we meet to discuss.
- We consider our policies to be guidelines, rather than mandates, which help individual and company performance. You'll be briefed on them [time frame].
- If you don't understand why I'm asking for something, please speak up and ask me.
- It's okay to admit what you don't know.
- It's important that you come to client/staff meetings prepared.
- Once you've become more familiar with the organization, we'll expect you to lead meetings.
- Take a day or two to get familiar with our systems. You can ask me or a coworker for help. I'll check in with you on [day].
- I can understand why you thought you needed to do [X], but I expected you to do [Y] because [xyz].
- I understand why you did [X], and I appreciate the initiative you took. However, there were some unintended consequences that I'd like to review.
- Quality is important throughout the organization. In your job that means things such as double-checking the spelling of a customer's name in emails and running spell-check on all documents before they go out.
- We hold all our employees accountable for on-the-job safety standards. Those standards include always holding onto the handrails on staircases and having a lid on beverage cups that you are carrying.
- If you observe someone not upholding our safety standards, it's expected you advise them to do so.
- These are the outcomes we expect to see: [xyz].
- Customer service is core to our business. We expect that phones be answered on the first ring rather than the third, that visitors be greeted when they enter the lobby, and that all calls are returned within [time period].

- I always want to hear what kind of help you need from me.
- These are the [e.g., five] most important things you need to know about [xyz].
- These are some pitfalls you should be aware of, specifically [xyz].
- When deadlines are missed, this is what can result.
- Do you have any questions about what I just explained? If you think of any later, please let me know.
- This is how we communicate within the organization.
- Initially, here are some short-term goals I want you to focus on.
- I sense you are anxious about these new [roles/responsibilities]. Let's take a few minutes to talk about it.
- In this role, your key performance measures will be [xyz].
- In this role, your main responsibilities will be [xyz].
- Within the next [time frame], I'd like you to accomplish the following: [xyz].
- We always set goals that have specific measures. These are the metrics that have been established for your goals.
- I encourage you to speak up if you have a question or if you disagree with something. You may be right.
- Don't hesitate to approach me or any other team member if you have a question, concern, or issue.
- You can call me at any time. If I'm not available, leave a message and I'll respond.
- Because you're new to the team, things may seem overwhelming. If you feel challenged, let us know so we can address it early.
- I want to assign priorities to these tasks and agree on some short-term milestones.
- I've noticed you've been getting to work late. Over the last [e.g., four weeks], you've come in 15 to 20 minutes late [number] times. I'd like to discuss this and see if there's anything we can do about this pattern.
- You keep making these sweeping generalizations that are hard to prove. You need to be more specific.

- We need to develop a plan that will help us to [e.g., expand into new markets]. I'd like to get some specific ideas from all the team members by Friday.
- These are some of the measures we use to evaluate the success of our outcomes.
- I want you to take some time to become familiar with the products/services we offer.
- We are a very process-oriented organization because [xyz]. It's important that you become familiar with the processes involved in your job.
- Read, observe, and ask questions.
- There are no ignorant or stupid questions here except the ones that aren't asked.
- We anticipate you'll have a steep learning curve on this assignment, so ask questions and ask for help.
- Some steps in the process may take longer than others—for example, [xyz].
- Don't be surprised if you encounter these obstacles along the way.
- Please ask me if you're unclear about anything I've said. I don't want you to be frustrated.
- In this organization, we value candor. Don't be afraid to speak up.
- Don't assume. Ask.
- There are no surprises. We help sooner rather than later.
- When something's not clear, we need to have a conversation around the topic.
- I'm very open to impromptu conversations. If I'm not available when you need to ask something, just send me a text.
- If you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you get there?
- I give clear direction to each team member so that everyone is working off the same playbook.
- This seems like a good time to discuss where we're headed.
- Let's make sure we're on the same page. Here's what I think we need to

do.

- Before we even begin, here's what I expect from you.
- Let's focus on what success will look like this quarter.
- Why don't we break down your goals into measurable pieces so we know where we stand?
- Before we even get started, here is my commitment to you and to the project.
- If there's ever a time when you don't understand what's expected of you, let me know immediately!
- What outcomes are we looking for here?
- What actions will we need to take to achieve our goal and what's your commitment to making it happen?
- Sometimes things don't work out as planned so I think we need to be really specific on what we're doing here (or what we want to accomplish).
- In support of the strategic plan, our goal is to increase revenue by 10 percent this year. You need to deliver at least one new client a month. If you do that, we will achieve our goal and you will get your annual bonus this year.

Accountability

Accountability is taking responsibility for your actions—owning your actions. It's critical to resolving conflict. At its core is, accountability is following through on what you committed to do. It is recognizing that your team members are dependent on your work and that it's imperative to not let them down. When accountability is ignored, conflicts arise. And if people aren't held accountable for their commitments or actions, morale suffers and team and organizational goals aren't met. Here are some phrases to use regarding accountability.

- The customer was told it would be ready by [date/time], but it wasn't. I can understand why he's confused and angry.
- We didn't let the customer know what happens next, so it's not surprising she's upset.
- When you say one thing and do something else, it's hard to have confidence or trust in you.

- I appreciate your initiative on this issue. Unfortunately, despite your best intentions, it's created new problems rather than solving the original one. We need to understand the problem before we can fix it.
- I recognize that you want to jump in and solve this problem, but your colleagues may have solutions they want to discuss. Don't do anything just yet.
- Can you explain why you're assigning blame/drawing conclusions?
- I know there was some confusion about the [new/existing] policy and that was my fault. I didn't apply it properly in the past.
- You offered to attend that meeting in my place and then didn't show up. Did you run into a problem of some kind?
- I'm responsible. I should have been accessible and I wasn't.
- I asked you to let me know if the assignment would be late, and you didn't do that. That put other things behind schedule.
- I think the situation with the customer was mishandled, but I share some of the blame. I should have made it clear that you had the power to offer additional options.
- You're correct. This should have never happened.
- I'll look into the situation, find out what happened, and follow up with you.
- I'm not sure exactly what went wrong, but I'll see that your concern is addressed.
- I understand why you're confused. I never gave you the instructions you needed to complete the work.
- I realize now that I wasn't clear in my instructions and you must have been taken by surprise.
- I didn't follow through and it caused a [delay/error/etc.]. It was my mistake.
- Both our names were on that report/proposal, but you let things slide and didn't follow through. That tarnishes both our reputations.
- I just discovered why you've yet to receive the completed report, and I have to take responsibility for it.
- Instead of always finding fault with everyone else and trying to pick a

fight with someone, take responsibility for the role you play in these situations.

- I didn't know this was my responsibility but maybe I should have since it's right here in my job description.
- Why didn't you ever tell me this is what you wanted me to do?
- I think I've done what you asked.
- When do I need to report my finding to you?
- How often do we need to meet?
- When and how do you want me to report on my progress?
- I'll never let you down.
- I will back you up on this, but I need you to do the same for me.
- How do you want me to communicate with you? Email, in person, voicemail, text?
- What do you mean this was my responsibility? We never talked about that and it's certainly not in my job description, so how would I know?
- I take full responsibility for my part in this problem.

Respond to Expectations

Despite how clear managers feel expectations are, such as when a project will be done or that work will be completed in a certain way, the message doesn't always come across clearly and what was expected doesn't happen. Regardless of the reason—whether the message was not received or was somehow miscommunicated, or something changed—it's important to respond to the situation as soon as possible so that things don't get worse. Whatever the situation, a discussion has to happen. Here are some phrases to use:

- I expected the final product would look a certain way based on prior/similar projects. What you delivered doesn't meet my expectations.

- You told us we could expect that the [work/project] would be finished by [date/time]. Imagine our surprise when we received a call today that you hadn't even started.
- If there's been a problem all this time, why am I just hearing about it now?
- You had indicated that I'd hear something by [date], but I didn't. This is a concern.

- I was expecting a finished product and you've given me a draft. When can you finish so that I have enough time to review it before it goes to the next level?
- You just directed me to do [xyz]. Could you explain why?
- You indicated that you needed a draft by (a certain date). What's the urgency?
- You've asked me to complete a task before the deadline. Is there a reason for this request?
- When you ask to see things ahead of schedule, I feel like I'm being micromanaged and it affects my ability to do my best work. Can we review the schedule we agreed upon?
- You keep changing the deadlines and its impeding our ability to get the job done.
- You've been asking for things you've never asked for before. Do you have a problem with my/the team's work?
- Please don't get defensive because I asked why. It's helpful to know the reason behind the request.
- You may have a very valid reason for asking for [xyz], but it is an unusual request. Why do you need it (or need me to do it)?
- Your comments imply that what we submitted was not clear. If you look at it, you'll see we followed the guidelines/protocols that were provided.
- I'm confused. Where did that (idea/requirement/change) come from? That's never been communicated before.
- The rules keep changing as we go along. It's confusing and I don't know what to expect.
- It's not that I'm/we're opposed to making changes or adjustments, but we need some notice so we can understand what's happening.
- We all have to have the courage to be confronted.
- I disagree with your approach, and I've given you reasons why I think my strategy would be more effective. Which way would you like me to handle the situation?
- It's unbelievably frustrating to continually be told our work isn't good enough or it could be better.

- You want me to back you when you're using facts that haven't been verified? I'm afraid I can't do that.
- If I use information that hasn't been fully researched, it will undermine my credibility, not yours. I won't do that.
- If you can explain what I don't know in terms of what I do know, it will be better for me.
- If you're not sure how much I know, ask me. Please give me the opportunity to show/tell you.
- Please let me know if I'm doing things the way you want me to.
- Don't just tell me what I'm doing wrong. Please tell me how to do it right.
- You weren't clear on how you wanted to proceed. Why are you criticizing us now?
- You need to communicate these changes often. Sending one email, which many of us didn't receive, isn't enough.
- The instructions you sent us were vague. What exactly do we need to do?
- We can't be sure what you really want when you're always changing your mind.
- I wrote the report based on the guidelines you gave us last month. Now you're telling me the format is wrong. Can you please explain why?
- When you come in and take over, especially when things are under control, it's annoying and disruptive. If I need help, I'll ask for it.
- Do you think I'm not doing my job? That's the message you sent when you followed up with my coworker about a shipment I'd already arranged.
- When you called the conference center about the delivery that was in my name, you confused the staff there and created havoc.
- You gave specific information/guidance, and now you've changed it. When that happens, I lose confidence.
- I know you thought you were giving me what I asked for, but what you brought back is totally off the mark. Let's go over it again.
- You never want to hear a dissenting opinion.

Feedback

We all need to know how we're doing, so providing timely and accurate feedback is a huge part of conflict resolution. Everyone needs to know what they're doing right and needs direction when they don't, of course. Regardless of the situation, feedback should be given (and accepted) in a sensitive and calm manner. It should provide specific information and be delivered in private. Use phrases such as these:

- I heard what you said, but I'm not sure I understand. Can you give me an example?

- If I take your feedback, what will it look like to you in the future?
- May I give you some feedback?
- What's the one thing I'm doing or not doing that would help me [meet the expectation]?
- I know this is awkward, but this is what I/others have noticed about your [work performance/conduct/etc. (give specifics)].
- The presentation you made was effective because [xyz].
- The report was good but this key point was missing. It's important to include it because [xyz].
- I want people to notice you for your contributions, not for your [conduct (such as outbursts in meetings) or manner of dress].
- I have a suggestion. Would be willing to [xyz]?
- Are you comfortable with that being your professional image?
- Tell me how I'm being unfair/unreasonable, *etc.*
- Thank you. I like knowing how I'm doing, because sometimes I'm not sure. I'm glad this is a two-way street.
- You did a great job handling that situation.
- The creativity you showed on this project was very inspiring. I'd like you to share your insights with the rest of the team/department.
- You seemed really frustrated this morning. Can we take some time to discuss why, and figure out what's working and what isn't?
- I realize that you're new to the [organization/department] and are accustomed to different ways of doing things, but I need you to try this new [system/process]. We've found it to be very effective and efficient.
- You've made some great progress, and I'd like to review some of the steps you implemented.

- I know you're passionate about this issue, but when you become visibly enraged, no one takes you seriously.
- You're overly sensitive to any criticism from your peers, even if it's offered as a way to help.
- You argued with your team constantly throughout the meeting. Behavior such as that compromises your integrity.
- You seem resentful because the others don't support your position. They see things differently.
- What you did today had the effect of undermining a colleague. That behavior isn't acceptable.
- I can't help but notice that your tone has been confrontational lately when you talk with your colleagues.
- You seemed uncomfortable when questioned in the meeting today. The information you shared was based on solid facts. How can I help you become more confident in these situations?
- You did a good job diffusing the situation earlier.
- Listen to yourself. When you say something like that, you alienate your team/clients.
- Learn to pick your battles wisely. Don't argue about every point.
- You had such disdain in your voice when you made those comments in the meeting. Think of how it made the others feel.
- When you speak in a sarcastic tone, you don't paint the best picture of yourself.
- You sounded angry with [name] before. Tell me about it.
- How is it going?
- Are you finding your way around okay?
- If you could do it again, what would you do differently?
- Do you realize when you do things like that, you undermine your own ability to be effective?
- I've noticed that you aren't as committed as you have been in the past. For example, you're letting deadlines slip and not giving any explanation.
- You don't seem to be as interested in the project as you have been. You

haven't been participating in meetings or sharing your ideas.

- Lately, you're not as involved in the department's activities as you used to be. You've been coming to meetings late and you even missed a few last month.
- You've been arriving 10 to 20 minutes late at least twice a week. It's impacting your performance. Coworkers are noticing, and it's affecting them.
- You keep asking rhetorical questions in meetings and they don't represent honest communication.
- Your constant use of jargon/rhetorical questions are creating hostility within the department instead of dialogue and cooperation.
- Your hostile actions toward established procedures is an embarrassment to us all.
- Your actions are causing chaos and that is not productive.
- If you're running late, slip into the meeting quietly. You can apologize when we break.
- I trusted you to finish this report/task and you didn't. I'm disappointed.
- When you send these cryptic emails, I'm not sure what you're asking or telling me. I need you to be more precise.
- You're projecting your prior bad experience into this situation and it's not relevant.
- I put a lot of faith in you to carry our department's message to the leadership team and you made me proud. You did a great job on the presentation today. Your slides were clear, your voice was strong, and you were able to answer all the questions. Good work!
- The research you did on this project was thorough, concise, and well-documented.
- I set a high expectation for this project and was very proud to share it with the leadership team and give you full credit.
- You know my expectation is that we show our value to each other. When you're late to a meeting, it shows disrespect for the other people. This has happened five times in this month and this is the second time I've brought it to your attention. Is there some reason you can't get here by 10 a.m.?

Don't Draw a Line in the Sand!

“To every problem, there is already a solution, whether you know it or not.”

—Grenville Kleiser

In conflict resolution, the parties have to focus on interests and move away from positions. The phrases in this chapter will help the reader focus on mutual interests, brainstorm and create options for mutual solutions, and consider options objectively.

Interests, Not Positions

A position is a stand we take in an argument, negotiation, or conflict. In reality, what we need to focus on are mutual interests and not individual positions. Interests are what we really want. They are our needs, desires, requirements, or concerns. When positions are front and center in a conflict, the real problem can get buried along with any potential solution. Here are some phrases to use:

- Let's address this so we can understand it better.
- We may have different ideas about solutions to this issue, but let's explore them.
- I know you may be skeptical, but hear me out.
- Innovation and new ideas are often the result of disagreements. Can we agree to disagree respectfully?
- We all have good ideas, but we need to be sure that everyone can be heard. Let's give everyone a chance to tell us their positions and options.
- It's important that we find common ground. We all have a common interest in this issue.
- I'm not going to change your mind, and I'm not trying to win, but I am curious about what you think.
- If we stay in our silos, we can't find a middle road, and we both/all have an interest in this issue.

- We need everyone to weigh in on these options.
- You don't need to buy into or accept every option, but you need to acknowledge it.
- It's obvious you're passionate about your position, but standing firm on it won't help us find common ground. We need to do that to resolve this issue.
- Let's put all this energy into suggesting potential answers to this problem. Think of the innovative ideas that will result!
- This group never holds back when it comes to offering opinions. Let's put our creativity to work.
- If you insist on doubling down on your position, we won't make any progress in solving this problem/addressing this issue.
- This isn't about making a deal; it's about solving a problem.
- There are no sides in this conflict. The solution has to address everyone's needs.
- You have to be willing to give up the need to be right and consider other viewpoints.
- We have to be willing to innovate and try new ideas.
- We shouldn't focus on who's at fault. We have to concentrate on identifying the issues and solutions.
- We have to think in terms of opportunities, rather than problems and individual positions.
- It's important that we're addressing the problem and not symptoms of the problem.
- We may have conflicting positions here, but we have to find common interests.
- This discussion is becoming very polarized. We have to find common ground before we go any further.
- I'm trying to understand what it is you really want.
- Is there something driving that position?
- What would having what you want gain you?
- Now that I understand what you want and why you want it, can we look

for creative ways to get this interest met?

- If I understand correctly, you're interested in [e.g., more challenging assignments] and wanting [e.g., to go to the conference] will prepare you for that.
- That's how I see it—not saying I'm right.
- We have to find a solution that works for us and our organization. We can't be selfish on this one!
- What we really need to focus on is what each of us wants from this discussion. In other words, what is our interest?
- Once I know what your interest is and you know mine, then we can start to look at where we might be on the same page. This will make a real difference in coming up with viable solutions.
- I'm going to lay out exactly how I feel about our disagreement and trust you will be open to hearing what I have to say.

Create Options

When people in a conflict situation stay focused on their position, they tend to think there are only two solutions: one that works for them and one that works for the other person involved in the issue. This stifles any creative thinking. What's needed is an open mind and a spirit to work to come up with solutions that will work for everyone and meet the mutual interests of all involved. Try these phrases:

- We want to encourage new ideas. Everyone approaches problems differently. We need to listen and consider other viewpoints.

- One way to begin is for each of us to write down some ideas and then take turns sharing them. Reporting out will continue until there are no more ideas to share.
- We have a lot of divergent views that were expressed and we need time to process them. Let's return tomorrow to evaluate each one.
- You're acting like a sore loser because your idea wasn't determined to be the best way to solve the problem. That attitude isn't helping the team, the organization, nor you.
- This is a tough situation, but we are creative people. Let's work to find a solution.
- This isn't a game. It's about solving the current problem. There's no room

for one-upmanship.

- We need to check our egos at the door and commit to finding a win-win solution, not a win-lose solution.
- There's no room for fragile egos. They'll only get in the way of resolving this situation.
- You can criticize the idea, but you must have facts to support your criticism. You can't, however, criticize the individual who suggested it.
- That's an interesting option, but it may not be the best solution for this problem. It should be examined along with other suggestions.
- I'm afraid the solution we implemented last month created more problems than it solved. We need to reevaluate the situation.
- We're open to new ideas and challenging past practices. We also need to think about why past practices work or don't.
- Let's agree that no one will lash out when an option is presented for discussion.
- The purpose of this exercise is to brainstorm and gather as many ideas as possible. Evaluating them will come later.
- Each of us must bring our expertise to the process of identifying potential solutions.
- If you're reluctant to share information or your thoughts on a position, there may be doubts about your commitment.
- It's okay to challenge the status quo. That's what sparks creative ideas.
- We can question or respond to each other's viewpoints after we've each explained it. Do you agree?
- We agree not to interrupt each other so communication is as open and honest as possible.
- Everyone will be given a turn to provide input.
- We want as many ideas as possible to flow from this session, so please no critique or reaction right now. We'll do that later.
- Never be afraid to offer a crazy idea. We're looking for innovation.
- Curiosity leads to creativity.
- Don't let fear of failure hold back an idea. New levels can be achieved by

new thinking.

- Problems have arisen, but we can't consider them to be roadblocks. That won't solve anything, but creative thinking will. All of you are extremely creative thinkers.
- Can we identify the assumptions that we're making and then examine them to determine if they are valid?
- This is an opportunity to offer potential solutions, not raise objections.
- I want as many diverse perspectives as possible. Then we can discuss them and come to agreement.
- Robust discussions and competing points of view lead to creative solutions.
- During this session, let's have no side comments among each other. It will be disruptive to the group and the process.
- There are endless possibilities, and it's okay to build on or modify any idea or proposal that's made.
- We're going to focus on ideas and possibilities, not personalities.
- Nothing can diminish a creative idea faster than ridicule.
- We don't have to make any decision today.
- We're not looking for the "right" answer. We want to create a solution that we'll act on together.
- What options do you see for solving this conflict?
- Creative ideas such as these are getting us talking. We're learning from each other.
- Failing to make a decision is not a valid choice.
- Putting off making a decision is wasting everyone's time.
- I want you to tell me how each solution that was proposed would meet your needs.
- Let's open up a conversation to stimulate debate.
- If we're going to get past this, we're both going to have to change. Let's start by listing all our possible options.
- Let's be as creative as possible in coming up with ways we can make this work. No idea is off the table.

- I won't criticize your ideas if you do the same for me. Then we can evaluate and pick the most viable options.
- There probably are lots of ways around our situation, and if we honor each other's ideas, odds are we can find a good solution.
- There is never only one way to do most things, so if we take the time to list out as many as we can think of, I have no doubt we have the ability to make this work and work well! Are you with me?
- Where do you suggest we start looking for a solution?
- I feel as if you're just stalling for time.

Evaluate Options

Hopefully, you've uncovered several possible solutions to resolve the conflict. Now's the time to carefully review and discuss each option. Then, prioritize the most reasonable solutions and, if necessary, take some time to make a final decision as to what action will be taken. Here are some phrases to use at this stage:

- The diversity of thought expressed in these ideas shows how creative we can be. Can we review them and decide which will work best in this situation?

- Now that we have identified some options to solve this problem, let's have an orderly discussion about each of them.
- Are there any questions about what is meant by this idea?
- Not so fast. We've got to evaluate each proposal on its own merits.
- You can disagree, but you've got to give a reason why.
- You can't just criticize an idea. You've got to provide facts that support your criticism.
- You can't attack someone's idea without proposing an alternative.
- You are probably thinking that I'm being unreasonable, but I'm following the protocols that have been set.
- I'm not saying that we can't make an exception to the policy, but I'd need a compelling reason to do so. Let's discuss it further.
- There'd have to be some mitigating circumstances in order to deviate from the established procedures. If you can give me more information, we can examine our options.

- I'm afraid I can't do what you're asking. The guidelines for the type of action you want to take are set by government regulations and this situation doesn't fit those regulations. I can offer some another solution that our policy will support.
- That's a good idea, but does it address the problem we're trying to solve?
- If we proceeded the way you're suggesting, we'd be setting a new standard for the organization. Are we prepared to offer this solution every time a similar situation arises?
- A gut feeling about an idea is not enough. We've got to evaluate it against a standard.
- My knee-jerk reaction to that option is that it won't work, but I'd like to hear more.
- We tried something similar in the past and found it didn't work because [xyz]. We need to look at what's changed since then and see if it will work now.
- We've got to talk and listen to each other so we can evaluate every idea on its own merits.
- We all have the responsibility to use judgment when we make decisions about these options.
- That's an interesting suggestion, but will it align with the protocols that have been set?
- We have to consider if any option presented has unintended consequences.
- We can't ignore precedent when making decisions.
- Let's not rush to decide on a solution without a plan to implement it.
- We all have to be willing to own and support any decision we make. Let's look at each option carefully.
- As we begin probing into all the facts, you may see things differently and change your opinion.
- Let's not be impulsive about coming to a decision. We need to examine each idea that's been proposed first.
- Your assumptions about this option are misleading.
- There are protocols that must be followed in these situations. You can't take shortcuts around them.

- These long-standing policies were put in place for specific reasons, and we can't just ignore them. I'm happy to explain the logic behind them.
- I realize we have generated many exciting new ideas, but we have to be careful not to discard the good work that's come before us.
- Now that we have a number of great ideas, let's look at them and narrow down the options.
- We have some great ideas. Can we figure out which are the most viable?
- If we ask good questions, we'll get good solutions.
- That idea has real merit. Let's consider how it might work.
- That's a really good idea and hearing how it's worked before in a similar situation is very helpful.
- What's your thinking about this idea/option?
- Can we consider the pros and cons of this proposal?
- What would be the upside and downside of this particular plan?
- If you don't think this proposal will work, can you tell us why? Do you have any alternatives?
- That's a very good idea, but do we have all the resources to implement the plan?
- What are the advantages of each option?
- How can we manage the downside of each of these options?
- We should consider [xyz] when making this decision.
- Here's an approach that could work.
- Can you be more specific about why you think this approach won't work?
- What would happen if we didn't follow the standard procedure?
- Is there an industry standard for that approach?
- If we take that approach, will it meet the existing criteria?
- I don't agree and here's why: [xyz].
- Why do you think that's the wrong approach to take?
- I like that idea because [xyz].
- I think that idea will work because [xyz]. Let's try it.

- What's the rationale behind your proposal? We're not going to do something just for the sake of doing it.
- Criticize the proposal, not the person.
- These remarks about our established procedures are creating hostility and not helping us find a resolution to the problem.
- That's a loaded term/phrase/word. Are you trying to scare people?
- I'm not familiar with how things get done in this organization because I've not worked here as long as you. Can you give me some insights on [xyz]?
- That's an interesting proposal. How would you make it happen?
- We're going to adhere to past practices. We're not going to change rules to fit this situation.
- What standard can we use to measure this option against?
- If we implement this plan, we'll know it's successful because [xyz].
- What would we have to do to get [xyz]?
- What if we changed our criteria to [xyz]?
- Could we redesign the schedule?
- Who else do we need to consult with about this approach?
- Who would have to give final approval?
- We'll need to do it a certain way to conform to the current guidelines. We'll have to see if we can make any changes.
- The only way we are going to come to a reasonable conclusion is if we base our decisions on data. We've been struggling, I think, because all we've had is antidotal information but now we have facts—so let's use them.
- Now that we're both clear where each other is coming from on this issue, is it time to reach for that objective conclusion and move on?
- Opinions vary and there probably are as many of them as there are people in this organization, but facts are facts.
- Strong emotions are wonderful but can really get in the way of making an objective decision. If we focus on what we know to be true and factual, we'll get to our solution in good time.

Whose Fight Is It, Anyway?

“Knowing when to fight is just as important as how.”

—Terry Goodkind

Managers often wrongfully assume that problem-solving inherently involves a top-down approach, and they find themselves intervening every time employees clash. It's not only managers who can be drawn into disputes. The phrases in this chapter will focus on mediating conflicts and responding to requests to get involved when it's not necessary, as well as appropriate phrases when intervention is necessary.

Who Owns It?

Every conflict is unique and conflicts are never simple, but one thing that's critical to resolving any conflict is to be clear as to whose conflict it is. A guiding principle of conflict resolution is that the problem should be solved by the individuals who own it. This can be complicated because sometimes people in conflict situations just want it to be over and they want someone else to solve it. Here are some phrases to use:

- Why are you bringing this concern to me?

Have you spoken with [name] about it yet?

- Why are you talking to me about this? If you have a problem with [name], then you need to talk to him/her.
- You're assuming that because I'm the manager, it's my responsibility to ensure peace between you, but it's not. You both have a role to play in this situation.
- My job as your manager is to assure that you work together cooperatively as members of the team.
- All this squabbling suggests there are issues on which you don't agree, like politics. As your manager, I'm concerned that it's affecting your performance and the performance of others in the department. Figure out how to work together so it doesn't have a negative impact.

- I recognize what the problem is: your behavior toward each other is disruptive. You have to decide how to solve it.
- You both have the joint responsibility and authority for deciding how to solve this issue.
- Thank you for bringing your concerns about [name] to me. I'm going to arrange for the three of us, you, me and [name], to meet to discuss this further.
- Tackle this problem in a productive way and stop defaulting to complaints.
- My role is to help members of my staff find solutions to their conflicts, not solve it for them.
- I'll support you both in working to find a solution to this problem that you can both accept, but I won't impose a solution on you.
- No, we don't have a problem; *you* do.
- Can you explain how your problem became our problem?
- I can't make a decision. You and [name] have to settle this yourselves.
- I can't solve this, but I can help you and [name] talk through the issues.
- You sounded angry with [name]. Did you talk to him/her?
- This problem is not going to work itself out. You've got to discuss this, take responsibility, and discuss possible solutions.
- You're both acting like warring factions. That's only making the situation worse.
- Instead of always trying to pick a fight, take some responsibility for your role in this situation.
- The solution to this problem is in your hands.
- I don't have a stake in this argument, but you do.
- Each of us has a part in this conflict. I'm willing to accept my responsibility; are you?
- Don't we all want the same thing—a work environment where our work matters and where we are valued and heard? Anything else is just icing on the cake!
- We're at a crossroads and need to decide who will take the lead on resolving this. Are you up for the challenge?

- Sounds to me as if you're blaming someone else.
- You're not taking any responsibility yourself for your part in this dispute.
- Don't you own at least part of this issue?
- Taking personal responsibility takes bravery sometimes. I would expect that of you.
- Are you ready to take responsibility for your part in this conflict?
- Why are you not stepping up to the part you played in this situation?
- I'm well aware that this issue isn't just about one person, so I'd be very grateful if you acknowledge that, even if you didn't start it, you kept it going.
- I'm not attaching blame. I just want each of you to own up to your part in this situation.
- I don't anticipate any repercussions for participating in this situation so please speak up.

Intervening

There may be times when, despite your efforts to get those who own the conflict to resolve it without involvement, you have no choice but to intervene. This may mean facilitating a discussion with those in conflict or mediating in order to bring it to closure. If you are hesitant to intervene, these phrases can help get these conversations started:

- I'm not going to solve this problem. You'll both have to come up with an option you can agree on.

- Frustration and impatience with each other aren't going to solve the problem.
- Was he aware there was a problem with [xyz]? Have you spoken with him about it?
- I'll be there to help you two find a solution that works, but I won't be deciding what that solution should be. I'll just help you calmly talk to each other. I won't be saying much.
- I'm happy to facilitate this discussion and arrange for a private place to talk, but you both have to commit to prevent interruptions, such as cell phone calls, and have a professional, business-like discussion.
- I hear your concerns about talking with [name] about this issue, but

because you're part of the problem, you've got to be part of the solution. I've arranged for a time and place to meet. This is a business problem, so I expect both of you to be there. Consider it your job assignment.

- We're in this meeting to find a solution, not to find fault. I recognize that you both have strong feelings. It's important that you express them openly and respectfully. I'll help you stay on track toward a solution.
- Silence isn't going to solve the problem. You need to talk to each other.
- Please talk to her and not to me.
- My opinion doesn't matter. You two need to find a solution that you can both agree to.
- You're acting like you're adversaries and not team members. Let's sit down and talk about this issue/situation/problem.
- We're not here to focus on blame. We want to prevent similar incidents from happening again.
- If you just focus on blame, we're never going to get the situation fixed. Let's look at what's happened.
- Can we agree that you've each contributed to this problem?
- What do you think you contributed to the problem?
- How did your actions impact the situation?
- It's time for you two to talk to each other directly rather than talking to everyone else.
- What are some things you can do to prevent a similar situation from arising in the future?
- I'm going to act as a third-party facilitator and mediate this difficulty that's arisen.
- I want to bring the entire staff together to discuss what is going on.
- I want the three of us to sit down and figure out what's wrong, but the two of you must decide how to fix it.
- I understand you feel that she [e.g., stole your client]. I want to hear both sides.
- I realize that you two have issues with each other, but tell me what you admire about the other.

- What do each of you think is the core of this issue? How do you each think we can resolve it?
- You're both engaged in a power struggle that will end up in a lose/lose situation.
- You did a good job diffusing the argument. Now let's discuss the underlying issue.
- Please describe for each other the problem as you see it.
- What do you think needs to change, improve, or happen differently?
- How do you think we can work out this issue/defuse this conflict?
- You're both creative people with lots of creative ideas. Can we use those ideas to solve this problem?
- If you two can't settle this argument, the whole team will suffer. I can facilitate a discussion between you to help work this out.
- I'm not offering suggestions. The resolution needs to come from you two, not me.
- Both of you stop. It would be a good idea to role-play so you can see each other's side of this issue.
- Seething silently isn't going to solve anything. I want each of you to tell the other what's bothering you.
- Let's stop talking about the problem and think of this as a challenge.
- We need to talk about the opportunity this challenge presents.
- How can we create some solutions to this opportunity that we've identified?
- Just to be clear before we end this meeting, let's review what we agreed to do.
- What do each of you think we should do?
- My job here today is to enable both of you to solve this problem.
- Listen to yourselves. This squabbling isn't helping to resolve the situation.
- Take what's wrong and make it right. Work it out.
- You may be uncomfortable speaking to him/her directly about this, but the problem isn't going to miraculously improve unless you do so.
- You can't keep working around her and the problem. You've got to work

together.

- When you let one person's views dominate, nothing gets done.
- If you don't come up with a solution to the problem, what do you think will happen?
- If each of you could be content with a solution, what would it be?
- I'd like each of you to propose something that would work for both of you.
- Each of you please restate what you heard the other say he/she wanted or needed.
- I hear a number of concerns being voiced. I want to write them down so we can prioritize them.
- What would you do with all this creative energy if you weren't arguing all the time?
- You have some choices to make about this disagreement you are having with him.
- It's not my place to make a choice/decision for you.
- My role is to challenge you to see the situation and encourage you to solve it.
- Consider approaching the problem this way.
- You're offering advice without knowing the full scope of the issues. Take a step back.
- There is more to this problem than what's on the surface. Please hold your comments.
- If you two have tried to resolve this in good faith and haven't found a solution, the three of us will sit down and resolve it.
- Each of you will have an opportunity to tell me your take on the issue, so please honor each other and listen carefully.
- Now that you've heard each other in this safe environment, do you now see a reasonable solution? If not, here's what we're going to do.
- If this solution doesn't resolve your differences, we will return here to discuss other options, but let me just be clear that I expect full cooperation from each of you.

- We're at a crossroads here in relation to resolving this. I've watched you struggle with a solution and I don't want to mess it up, so here's what I want to do.
- You've left me no alternative but to intervene. It's obvious this isn't going to stop unless I stop it, and it stops right now.
- I'd hoped you could resolve this yourselves but that doesn't seem to be happening so here's what's going to happen and why.
- We've given you all the tools you needed to resolve this but it appears that's not enough, so we'll meet tomorrow to get this over with.
- I've stayed out of this as long as possible, but your conflict is having a negative impact on the team, so you leave me no choice but to step in.
- I am disappointed that you two couldn't resolve this on your own, but I would be remiss if I didn't stop this from going any farther.
- Let me be clear that I never intended to be in this situation between the two of you, but you've left me no choice.
- I'm very disappointed in your inability to come to an agreement. You are both capable of so much more.
- It has been very discouraging watching this issue move beyond where it started. As your manager, I have no choice but to mitigate the impact on the rest of the department.

I'm Not in It!

If you find yourself being pulled into a conflict that you don't own and you either don't have the authority or the means to resolve, you'll need to extricate yourself in a way that doesn't add fuel to the fire. Here are some phrases to use if this happens: • No, I'm not taking sides. It's not about one of you getting your own way. It's about fixing the problem.

- If you're having a problem with our coworker, either talk to him or to our boss. I've got no control over the situation.
- You're complaining to me about my coworker, but I can't fix the situation. It's between you and her.
- I can't speak to him on your behalf. It's your issue, not mine.
- Don't look to me to referee this dispute between you and him.

- If you think this situation is unfair, don't complain to me. Tell someone who can fix it.
- It won't solve anything for me to speak about a situation I'm not involved in. I don't understand the problem.
- You're in this dispute, not me. You've got to speak up and explain it from your perspective.
- Your behavior is impacting the rest of the team. Both of you have to decide how you're going to resolve it and interact with each other in the future.
- You need to find some common ground where you can talk sensibly to each other and not to me. I'm not part of your problem.
- You can't come running in here every time he says or does something.
- So you don't like what she said/did. It's not the manager's/HR's job to make sure everyone gets along. Work it out with her.
- I'm not in charge of workplace harmony. You've got to learn to talk to/work with him.
- You're always griping about something, but you don't seem to want to take responsibility to change anything.
- When you complain to me about her, it distracts me from my job and keeps me from doing my work.
- I'm not the fixer of all the problems here. I don't even have a role in this dispute. Please don't involve me.
- This issue doesn't impact me at all. It isn't my fight.
- All of your complaining isn't going to change anything. Take it to someone in charge, not me.
- Have you ever thought about what might happen if you actually talked to him about your concern?
- Exactly why is this my problem?
- I'm not in it!
- You're upset with her, but you keep complaining to me. This is slowing down our productivity.
- The disagreement you're having with [name] is creating tension for all of us. Go talk to him.

- I'm not going to listen to either side's story. I'm remaining objective so I can work with you both.
- You both need to work out your differences and stop talking to everyone else about it. It's affecting the morale of the entire department.
- You keep telling me why you think she is wrong. Have you told her?
- I have to work with both of you, so, no, I'm not going to take sides.
- You have to have an honest conversation with [name].
- I can't solve this for you.
- You've got to take responsibility and address your concerns with him.
- Please don't involve me in this issue.
- Stop talking *about* him and talk *to* him.
- She is probably in the dark about how you feel about this situation. Talk to her, not to me.
- All of this gossip and drama has to stop. Talk to each other and not everyone else.
- Do you have any idea, any thoughts, on how you are going to resolve this problem that you're having with her?
- You keep complaining that the policy/decision isn't fair, but you make no effort to understand it.
- Please leave me out of this. It has nothing to do with me.
- Sorry, you're on your own on this one.
- I know you can deal with this on your own.
- You know what you have to do to resolve this.
- I'm not in this one so I'm stepping out.
- This one's yours to deal with.
- The only two people in this situation are you and [name], so I'm out of here.
- I will support you if needed but this isn't my battle to fight.
- You really don't want me involved in this.
- I'll help you frame the issues, but I am not part of the solution so I am excusing myself when that part is over.

- Please stop right now. I am not part of this so count me out.

Are You Playing Nice in the Sandbox?

“Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.”

—Mother Theresa

Disruptive behavior can be extremely distracting. When that behavior evolves into bullying, harassment, and, more seriously, workplace violence, it can be disastrous. The phrases in this chapter will help the reader point out inequities, set boundaries, respond to disruptive behavior, and have respectful confrontations.

Respectful Confrontation

Many things may motivate someone to behave in a disruptive manner, but it's futile to try to figure out why. It's more effective to confront the situation positively and resolve the conflict. Try one of these phrases: • I don't appreciate it when you say/do [xyz]. I do appreciate it when you [xyz].

- When you make comments about [someone's/my age, weight, or other physical characteristic], you are going after my/their dignity.
- Comments about [someone's/my] physical characteristics are belittling and demeaning. I have to ask you to stop making them.
- Those types of comments/jokes that you are making don't belong in the workplace. Let's keep things professional.
- I don't appreciate being spoken to like that.
- Every time you interrupt, you're undermining the meeting. Please let me finish.
- These emails (or comments) are taking aim at our coworkers for no reason. Please stop.
- You may intend the jokes and comments to be funny, but they aren't.

They are insulting.

- Having fun at someone else's expense isn't amusing. It's disrespectful.
- Talk like that is disingenuous and doesn't support the values of our organization.
- Those comments you just made border on vulgarity. Please stop.
- Interrupting is rude. I'd appreciate if you refrain from doing so.
- Talking over each other in meetings is just not productive. Can we each wait our turn?
- Your style, while it might be comfortable for you, is disruptive in this environment. Let's talk about a more proactive approach.
- Belittling other people doesn't make you a bigger person. We can't behave like that at work.
- Hateful and hurtful rhetoric/jokes have the effect of dehumanizing others. That's not the environment for this organization.
- Our organization is built on inclusion. Don't be dismissive toward others in your comments or actions.
- Let's not drag everyone (the whole team) down with this type of talk.
- This attacks the very base of who we are as an organization. We can't accept this type of behavior at work.
- This is a professional workplace. There's no room in it for the coarse language and words that you're using.
- Every interruption takes us backward, not forward. Can we please respect each other's turn to speak?
- I'm not asking you to be "politically correct," as you put it; I'm asking you to be respectful.
- Every joke you make about gay people [or other characteristic] is personal for me. I have a [close relative/friend] who is gay. Even if I didn't, it's disparaging and you need to stop.
- If you want to make jokes or criticize, get your facts straight about what I said.
- When you say things like that, I'm not comfortable because [xyz].
- This is what I heard you say, and this is what I feel about it and why I feel

that way.

- That type of language encourages/supports divisiveness. That's not the culture in this organization.
- Statements like that just provoke bad feelings. They're not respectful.
- When you interrupt me in meetings, it discredits my input. If you could wait until I'm finished, I'll ask for your thoughts.
- Remarks like the one you just made are condescending and send the message you think you're better than others.
- Don't interpret a smile or feigned laugh to be an acceptance of offensive behavior. Some people are embarrassed or fear repercussions if they say anything.
- Jokes such as those attack the dignity of everyone, especially you.
- You might consider what you said a compliment, but that comment was sexual and inappropriate. There are very clear guidelines about harassment.
- Those comments are very dismissive.
- Remarks like that embarrass me in front of others. It implies that you think I'm lazy and don't do my job.
- Did you mean to insult me/them with your remark? Are you aware that you did?
- Your words are teasing, but I detect there's something more in your tone. Do you enjoy poking fun at people?
- I want to make sure I understood what you said. I took the comment to be a negative remark about me/my work. Is that what you meant?
- That type of language is out of line. You need to stop it now.
- I don't appreciate hearing those kinds of comments, especially about a coworker.
- Comments such as those are unprofessional and create ill will.
- When you make remarks and jokes like the ones you just made, they distract everyone in the meeting. It's unproductive.
- All of this name-calling is not helping the work environment. Several people have asked to leave the team.

- Your passive-aggressive behavior doesn't work in this organization.
- When you come into a meeting late and interrupt with your excuse/explanation, you waste everyone's time.
- Silence about disruptive behavior is the same as encouraging it, and I can't do that. I've got to point this out to you.
- Every time you interfere, it slows down the process and wastes time and money.
- I've noticed you and [name] seem to be at odds. Let's set a time for the three of us to meet.
- What you said in the hallway to [name] was totally out of line. This can't happen here.
- We need to talk about why you were so negative in the meeting today. Is something bothering you?
- I'm sorry you feel that way, but we're a team and you need to participate in our meetings and activities even when you don't agree with where we're headed.
- Can I ask why you spoke to me in such a confrontational manner today?
- It's obvious that you think I'm wrong. Let's talk about it so we can get back to working together in a productive way.
- I wasn't happy with what happened in the client meeting and would like to talk it out with you so that we're on the same page. We can't have those kind of disagreements in front of a client ever again.
- We have always had a strong working relationship based on mutual trust and respect, but today I feel like that's going in the wrong direction. Let's set a time to meet and work on getting back to our positive working relationship.
- We don't always have to agree on everything but I would sure like your support.
- I don't want to hurt our relationship, but I was told you've said some hurtful things about the way I'm managing the project. I'd like to get any issues you have with me on the table and not talked about with others.
- If you don't agree with what I did, please come to me before you go to our boss. What was most likely a simple misunderstanding is now a major issue that's put me in a very difficult position.

- Please don't confront me publicly like you did just now in the break room.
- If you have an issue with me, please don't involve anyone else until we've talked. How about now?
- It's so easy to blame others for our failures or to say things are out of our control, but let's not make that our default when challenges come up.
- Your negativity is extremely upsetting to the team.
- Your attitude is having an impact on the morale of this entire division. You need to adjust that attitude right here and right now.
- We need to talk about why you fight me on every idea I bring up. I want to hear your thoughts as to whether it's me or my ideas you don't like.

Intent vs. Impact

People don't always mean for their behavior or language to be offensive or intimidating, but we can't assume that behavior won't have a negative impact on other people. Words and actions do matter, can affect other people's ability to do their best work, and can cause conflicts to escalate. It's best to address this behavior when it happens and explain the impact it has or potentially could have on others, with phrases such as these: • When this happens/when you do this, I feel [xyz].

- Do you realize how comments like that make other people feel?
- Do you realize when you just interrupted the conversation I was having with her, your action had the effect of dismissing her? It could have sent a message that you're more important than she is.
- Those types of comments have the effect of objectifying other people.
- Are you aware that such comments degrade not only me/not only [e.g., women], but everyone?
- Have you thought about the effect those comments have on other people?
- Have you stopped and listened to what you're saying? Do you realize how those words could make other people feel?
- What you said made me feel [xyz].
- Your tone makes me feel [xyz].
- Do you realize what you just said trivializes a whole group of people?

- You don't know what his sensitivities are, and those jokes and comments you made may bring back painful memories for him.
- I said something earlier that I shouldn't have. I didn't realize it could have offended you. I'd like to apologize.
- You may think you're paying me a compliment when you call me a "girl," but it implies that I'm not an equal member of the team and diminishes my contribution.
- Be mindful about making broad, general statements about people/situations. You may inadvertently offend someone.
- When you make remarks directed at one member of the department, you may believe you're being helpful to him/her, but it has the effect of making everyone in the meeting uncomfortable.
- Rolling your eyes when someone in the meeting is speaking sends the message that nothing he has to say is valuable.
- Are you aware that the tone of voice you're using doesn't match that of your words?
- I'm not sure you're aware, but when you do this, [xyz].
- I know you don't mean to be offensive, but when you say [xyz], other people perceive it to be an insult.
- Making statements such as "just like a man" or "typical woman" generalizes people based on their sex, and it can be perceived as demeaning.
- I feel discounted when you refer to me as a "young lady." It has the effect of saying that I don't have the same level of experience as you.
- I could hear the disdain in your voice when you made those comments. You may have thought you were joking, but not everyone took them as jokes.
- This may not be obvious to you, but remarks like the one you just made have the effect of marginalizing groups of people.
- Do you realize when you do things like that, you undermine your own credibility?
- The tone of your voice is sending a very negative message.
- You had such disdain in your voice when you made those comments in the

meeting. Think of how it made the others feel.

- Listen to yourself. When you say something like that, you alienate your team and your clients.
- What you did today had the effect of undermining a colleague. Did you mean to do that?
- You argued with your team constantly throughout the meeting. Behavior such as that compromises your integrity.
- When you act like that, it has the effect of intimidating your team members.
- When you use jargon or ask rhetorical questions, people don't take you seriously and tend to ignore you as well as your remarks.
- Do you realize the effect your harsh approach has on others? It puts people on the defensive.
- Bringing up this topic is very difficult for me. I'm sure you didn't intend to be hurtful, but when you said/did [xyz], it made me feel [e.g., marginalized/diminished].
- Every time you interrupt people in a meeting, they shut down and it makes the meeting less productive.
- Comments like that have the effect of demoralizing the entire team.
- Do you realize that what you just said questions the integrity of your colleagues?
- You may not be aware, but whenever you check with other people to see if I've completed a task, it makes me feel you don't trust I'm doing my job.
- I know you think you're being helpful, but when you hover over me while I'm working, it's hard to concentrate.
- You think you're assisting me. In fact, you're interfering.
- I was shocked and upset when you blew up at me in the staff meeting today. I need to understand where this is coming from so we can hopefully get past it.
- Never, ever speak to me like that again. I know you were upset but you may have destroyed a great working relationship by your outburst.
- Do you think before you speak? I wonder if you do because you've said some pretty awful things to me lately and it hurts.

- This is the second time this week that you've raised your voice at me in public. I know you apologized yesterday, but you did it again today and that's totally unacceptable.
- Please stop using that tone of voice with me. It makes me feel as if you think you're better than I am or smarter than I am and I don't like it.
- I am pretty sure you think you're funny, but what you said at lunch today about disabled people really bothered me. I know you're aware my daughter is in a wheelchair, so this is personal to me.
- We value respect. When you laughed at [name] today in the staff meeting, when he was making a valid point, it was dismissive and inconsiderate. I want you to apologize to him today and let me know when that's happened.

Establish Boundaries

Boundaries have eroded as today's workplaces have become more relaxed and informal. Yet boundaries—those invisible lines that help define roles and manage interpersonal relationships at work—are important. Boundaries define limits: where you end and where others begin. They define responsibilities and foster accountability. Here are some phrases to use with regard to boundaries:

- I'm not comfortable talking about personal issues, such as problems with your spouse/partner or personal finances.
- I don't think this is an appropriate topic to be discussing at work.
- I don't appreciate [e.g., that type of humor, those remarks or comments].
- It's not appropriate to be making jokes at someone else's expense.
- Gossiping about our coworkers' personal lives is not professional. Please stop.
- That's my personal business. I really don't want to talk about it.
- You said some things earlier that were personal which made me feel embarrassed and uncomfortable. Those types of comments don't belong at work.
- I know that this situation is upsetting for you, but we need to have this discussion in a more private place. Let's step into an office.
- It's okay to compliment me on the outfit I'm wearing, but comments about my body are not acceptable. Please don't do that again.

- If you want to have a conversation, please honor my personal space and don't get so close when you speak to me.
- You probably intended that joke to be funny, and it may be among your friends. But jokes about [e.g., someone's looks, sexual orientation] don't belong at work.
- I know you've been upset about [e.g., a parent's health, a problem with your spouse], and you're sharing a lot of personal information. Do you really want everyone knowing about this?
- I left after the meeting because you started talking about your boyfriend, and I'm not comfortable with such personal discussion at work.
- When people touch my hair, as you did this morning, it makes me uncomfortable.
- Whoa! You're much too close. Please respect my personal space.
- It's unacceptable to tell offensive jokes or send/forward offensive emails.
- If you're not sure if language or behavior is offensive, then err on the side of caution and don't say/do it.
- What you're asking is personal. I'd rather not answer that question.
- Questions/comments like the one you just asked/said make me uncomfortable.
- I'm not comfortable answering a question about [xyz].
- That's personal information, and discussions about it make me uneasy.
- Hey, let's not go there. We're at work and not in the bar after hours!
- Sorry, but don't tell me anymore. I don't gossip.
- Too much information!
- I've told you before that I don't want to hear your criticism of our government or officials. You have your opinion and I have mine, and "never the twain shall meet!" So, please stop sending me stuff to get me to change my position—not going to happen.
- Please take me off your email list for personal stuff or jokes. You and I don't have the same sense of humor.
- I'm not saying that some of what you said at lunch today wasn't funny. I'm saying what you said was not appropriate for a work crowd. Save those jokes for your poker night or someplace outside of work.

- Maybe you're not aware that some of our coworkers have significant others of different races so your comment on that topic was really out of line.
- I don't want to hear it—now or ever!
- Stop right now!
- Stop!
- Enough!
- That's not funny. Please be quiet!
- You know I do my best to keep my private life separate from my work life, so I'd appreciate it if you don't ask questions about my dating life.
- I am pretty sure you think you're being funny when you tease me about my upcoming wedding and honeymoon, but knock it off. It's gotten really old!
- I can tell you're upset about your personal life, but please remember this is a place of work and we need you to not discuss that issue here.
- Let me be clear: don't forward silly videos of dancing cats or singing dogs to me at work.
- I'm walking away now. This isn't funny!
- This conversation really isn't appropriate in the workplace. Let's wait until after hours for that topic.
- I am happy to be part of this discussion but the moment you stray into personal territory, I am leaving and won't be back.
- It's really important to me that you honor my time commitments. When you call meetings for after 5 p.m., I miss my carpool, which causes me to be late to pick up my baby, and that means I have to pay a fine. Please, can we meet earlier?
- I'm feeling ambushed. Can we set some parameters here?

9

You Can Always Say This...

“If I could solve all the problems myself, I would.”

—Thomas Edison

There are phrases that can be used in a wide variety of different situations, including when you want to focus on the facts, manage emotions, or simply apologize for a mistake or for stepping on someone’s toes. The phrases and questions in this chapter will help you navigate the murky waters when dealing with conflict. They can diffuse anger and build stronger working relationships. Here are some examples: • We need to build bridges between our departments, not walls. We can’t work in silos.

- What did I/you do or not do that added to this result?
- We both have the same desired outcome.
- Why would you say something like that?
- Why would you do something like that?
- What was your objective when you said [xyz]?
- We’ve been having difficulties lately when we talk about [xyz].
- Do you want us to try to work out this problem?
- We agree on the importance of [xyz]. Can we talk about it further?
- Is everything happening as you expected it to happen?
- I’d like to hear more about the situation from your perspective.
- Thank you for speaking up. You brought something important to our attention.
- This is a classic misunderstanding. Too much misinformation has been exchanged. Let’s start over.
- You can’t bristle at every comment made that is contrary to your opinion.

Keep an open mind.

- We can disagree as long as we do so with civility and grace.
- We need to stay focused on the current issue. Those statements may be true, but they're not relevant to this problem.
- I'm afraid I can't do that and this is why.
- A good place to start would be to help me understand exactly how you see the situation.
- What do you think we should do about the situation? Why?
- I understand you have doubts about whether we can work through this issue. Let's talk about it and think creatively.
- I know you weren't very enthusiastic about having this conversation, and I appreciate the time you've taken out of your busy day to discuss this problem.
- I was upset by something you said in the meeting this morning. I want to explain what's bothering me and hear your perspective.
- I want to share my concerns about [xyz] and hear your thoughts about what might be contributing to it.
- Don't get defensive. I just made an observation, not a criticism.
- I understand that you're angry about this, and I might be too if I were in your situation. But this has to be resolved.
- I appreciate your willingness to talk about this issue. We still don't agree, but at least we better understand it.
- That isn't exactly what I meant. Let me rephrase it.
- I think you misinterpreted what I said. Maybe I wasn't clear.
- I need some time to think about this situation. I'll get back to you in the morning.
- I'm afraid I can't because [xyz].
- I'm not comfortable supporting that position because [xyz].
- What options do you see to prevent future occurrences?
- It's okay to disagree and have robust discussion about our disagreements, as long as we do so in a respectful way.
- Thanks for letting me know that this was a problem. I appreciate your

telling me directly.

- Thank you for your candor.
- Your points are well taken.
- I know it was difficult for you to raise this issue, and I appreciate your caring enough to mention it to me.
- Frankly, I'm willing to [xyz].
- Unkind words have no place in this organization.
- Have you asked anyone who'd be affected what they think?
- When you make these sweeping generalizations, people don't take you seriously.
- When you use jargon, people think you're trying to impress or confuse them. It's damaging to relationships.
- You keep asking rhetorical questions in meetings, and they don't represent honest communication.
- Your constant use of jargon is creating hostility instead of dialogue and cooperation.
- We're not going to use chaos to push through change.
- Let's draw on each other's strengths and work collaboratively.
- Perhaps I didn't get the message across.
- No acronyms, please. Not everyone understands them.
- The problem is not going to work itself out. We need to discuss some solutions.
- That's what you did, and I never thought to question it. I probably should have.
- I was hurt to learn that [xyz], and I'm struggling not to take it personally. Can you share your reasoning about this decision?
- Please don't talk down to me or lecture me.
- I appreciate receiving necessary information, but repeated repetition of the same facts that I've already acknowledged is off-putting.
- What approach do you think you will take on this issue?
- We're here to solve problems, not create controversy.

- You're laughing. Did you find something I said funny?
- We're in this together. Don't think of us as being enemies. We're allies.
- I saw something from a different vantage point, and I acted to keep everyone safe. I wasn't trying to overshadow you.
- Yes, I discussed the situation with people who had a need to know, but I didn't say anything to disparage you.
- Never underestimate the strength of your words.
- The only way we're ever going to be successful is if we work together.
- I don't think there's anything we can't overcome if we pull together.
- Our mission brings us together, but it takes all of us to achieve our goals.
- It may sound trite, but the bonds that hold us together are stronger than the forces that seek to divide us.
- We can't let differences get in the way of achieving our goals and objectives!
- Although we value frank and open discussion, when decisions are made, we move as one toward the final goal.
- We need to be united on this issue.
- Maybe we should agree to disagree?
- Do we have to always agree on everything?
- Just because we see things differently doesn't mean we can't work together successfully.
- Is what I want the outcome to be even possible?
- Let's keep in mind that our goal is to have a highly productive work environment in which good work is encouraged, acknowledged, and rewarded.
- We acknowledge that conflict can occur at any time in any organization.
- Some conflicts spur innovation and creativity while others damage working relationships. Our goal is to encourage the former and resolve the latter.
- Let's brainstorm options.
- What if we were to [xyz]?

- I'm pretty sure you have a good reason for what you just said.
- In a word, yes.
- Simply put, of course I will talk with you about [xyz].
- You're reading my mind. I agree with what you just said.
- Let's give it a try. What do we have to lose?
- That's completely open for discussion.
- Why wouldn't we look for our common beliefs and interests?
- I don't think that's impossible, but it will take some work to get there.
- That's probably not out of the realm of possibilities, but we need more research.
- I'm really curious about why you feel/think this way.
- It's always a pleasure to talk with you on any topic and I hope we can make progress today on this subject.
- What more can I tell you?

Focus on the Facts

People spend huge amounts of time in discussions based on observations or feelings. Focusing on the facts moves the process to get to the central issue, and then you're able to work toward resolving the conflict. Many people skip this step and conflicts grow, so take time to look at the facts *before* you jump to conclusions. Here are some phrases to use:

- We need facts, not innuendos.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- It's important that we look at the facts and reflect on/think about them.
- If we don't have the facts, it will cause disruption. The situation will become worse.
- The claim you just made sounds fabricated. What details do you have to support it?
- You're talking in sound bites. What are the facts behind them?
- This isn't the time for creative license. Be certain what you're saying is accurate.
- That may be your impression of the events, but have you challenged your

assumptions to make sure they're accurate?

- It's a fact! You can't disagree.
- When you disagree with a fact, it's like saying you don't agree the sun will rise every day.
- You can't just ignore facts you don't like or that don't favor your perspective.
- When you deliberately give faulty information, it affects your credibility. No one will take you seriously.
- We don't take liberties with facts.
- What are the real facts in this situation—honestly?
- What assumptions are you making and are they valid?
- What information do you need?
- These facts may be inconvenient for your position, but they represent the truth.
- These claims can be easily disproved.
- If you persist in spreading trivial falsehoods, it will undermine your trustworthiness.
- You can't keep making claims without evidence to back them.
- Can you offer any verifiable evidence to support that statement?
- Beliefs are not facts.
- We can't create our own reality. We have to have a common basis of facts.
- Either share with us the information to back this up or stop making the claim.
- You can't arrive at conclusions before gathering evidence.
- I think you're exaggerating some of the facts.
- We always stand behind the truth.
- You keep making these sweeping generalizations that are hard to prove. Be specific and provide data.
- We can disagree on how we feel about something and still come to a consensus over facts.
- We make decisions in this organization based on facts.

- We never underestimate the effectiveness of data when we solve problems and make decisions.
- I'm not presuming anything. I'm stating facts.
- This is all speculation. We can't use that to make decisions.
- I don't want to hear perceived or alternative facts. We have standards for verifying information that I expect you to use.
- Never assume that you know everything that I know.
- It's easy to armchair quarterback without all the facts.
- Think of it however you want, but the information we have doesn't support your viewpoint.
- We don't have any evidence of that, so let's avoid rumors and focus on what we know.
- There is nothing to support that statement, which appears to be gossip. Let's stick to the facts we know and if anything changes, we can adjust our position.
- That information hasn't been corroborated and we are not going to consider it now.
- You can't reshape the truth to fit your needs.
- When you have conflicting information, be sure to verify it.
- Don't depend on second-hand information. Go to the primary source.

Apologize

No matter how carefully we speak, there will be times when we say the wrong thing or inadvertently hurt someone. In these cases, it's critical to apologize and move on. A genuine apology is never a sign of weakness. Rather, it's a vital part of conflict resolution and is necessary to clear the air of any ill feelings. Your apology must be sincere, and if you don't mean it, it's better left unsaid. If admitting you were wrong is difficult for you, practice it until you're comfortable. Being able to apologize and sincerely mean it is the sign of someone with high emotional intelligence. Here are some phrases to use when apologizing:

- I'm sorry.
- Will you accept my apology?
- I failed to notify you about [xyz] and I should have done so. I apologize.

- I didn't follow through on the report, and that delayed you. I'm sorry. What can I do to help you get it done?
- I didn't plan well and kept you waiting. That was wrong.
- That tweet was insensitive. I should have thought before I sent it. I'm so sorry.
- That humor was out of line. I regret I made light of what was a serious situation.
- I'm sorry. I must have misunderstood.
- I make no apology about this. I was acting on information provided to me.
- I'm sorry. That was my fault.
- I should have caught that error. I apologize. I'll fix it right away.
- I know you were expecting this on [date]. I'm sorry it delayed finishing the project.
- I didn't follow through on the task. Please accept my apology.
- I'm sorry for any confusion it caused.
- I apologize if you misunderstood, but I don't apologize for the facts.
- I'm sorry I can't provide you with [xyz], but you need approval first.
- I'm sorry I reacted the way I did.
- I apologize that my failure to [xyz] has impacted some of you.
- I'm sorry you feel that way. It wasn't my intent to hurt you.
- I really don't want this to blow up. I'm sorry if I said something that upset you.
- I'm sorry if that upset you.
- I'm sorry that you feel that way.
- When you shared the impact our issue had on you, it really went right to my heart. I had no idea this was so difficult for you, and I sincerely apologize.
- If I hurt your feelings, it wasn't my intent and I'm sorry.

Manage Emotions

Listening for emotions and attitudes is critical for keeping the conversation

positive and productive. Is the other person expressing his/her feelings either directly or indirectly? What feelings is he/she displaying and is he/she aware of them? How are emotions impacting the conversation and the situation? When dealing with emotions and emotional behavior, you need to respond rather than react, with phrases such as these: • I think we need to take a break and resume this later.

- You seem really upset. However, I'm having a hard time understanding what this means to you and your job. Can you explain this further?
- I'm not following what this has to do with the situation.
- I'm a bit confused. Can you help me to understand the situation?
- So, what was it you wanted to tell me about the situation?
- Take a deep breath. You're upset and I'm having a hard time following you. Let's take a break.
- I don't think we can continue this conversation at this time. Let's agree to reconvene at [time].
- Was there something that he/she said to you that triggered the outburst you had in the meeting?
- You're rambling and not making sense. Take some time to gather your thoughts and come back at [time].
- We're getting off track, and I'm not sure what your last statement has to do with the issue. Let's regroup and review what we know.
- I know you're mad, but yelling at me isn't going to solve this problem.
- What exactly does your last statement have to do with this issue?
- Using that tone of voice and being argumentative isn't going to resolve anything.
- Sitting there sulking isn't going to make the problem go away.
- You've already brought that issue up, and we decided it wasn't relevant. If you have new information, I'm happy to discuss it.
- Why are you bringing that issue up again? It's been settled. Let's keep this discussion focused on the current issue.
- I'm not following what you're saying. Can you be more specific or give me some examples.

- Let me explain why I'm [e.g., confused/upset/angry].
- Give me a moment. I'm frustrated by the situation and I don't want you to think I am yelling at [or angry with] you.
- If I can explain what happened, perhaps you'll understand why I'm angry/frustrated/upset.
- I don't mean to lash out at you. This situation has gotten to me.
- Now that you've gotten yourself together/regained your composure, I've got some questions to ask.
- You're pretty excited and throwing a lot of information at me. Let's back up so I can ask you some detailed questions.
- I disagree with your interpretation of [xyz]. Can you explain more?
- I understand your point, and I'd like you to understand mine.
- I hear what you're saying, and I have a different view.
- Some people definitely do not share my concerns about [xyz], but I want to express them anyway.
- Pardon me, I'm not finished.
- May I finish this thought?
- I didn't get to finish what I was saying.
- I need another few seconds to explain why I feel that way.
- I didn't get to elaborate a moment ago about my concerns.
- That wasn't fair. I'm sorry I lost my cool right now.
- My outburst was not professional. Let me try that again.
- When you talk about a topic not related to the current issue, it doesn't move the conversation along.
- The language and tone of this discussion are growing disturbing. Let's take a break and resume later.
- Can we deal with the facts in a rational manner? That's the only way we'll uncover the problem/issue.
- Those sound like fighting words. Time to take a break, cool down, and reflect.
- When you don't respond, follow up, or get back to me, I'm not sure where

the situation stands. It's frustrating.

- Excuse me, I'm going to step out.
- We value respect and civility in our organization, so emotional and angry conversations have no place here.
- Please keep your voices down and your emotions in check.
- If we go into this conversation knowing we will not try to sway each other's opinion, it can help keep our frustrations in check.
- When emotions run high, it's important to confront with compassion.
- Let's both take a few minutes to compose ourselves, then we can talk further.
- Your tone of voice is making me uncomfortable.
- We could probably have a good discussion if we could get the emotion out of it.
- Everyone has a bad day once in a while. Let's start again tomorrow.
- I'm happy you spoke up about this. It's gone on for too long.
- I'm happy you want to discuss this. I've been waiting for the right opportunity to speak about it, and now seems like a good time.
- I really don't want this to blow up in our faces. What can we do to stop it now?
- Sounds like you need to take a minute to clear your head. Let's talk again.
- I know this is hard, but being angry isn't going to get us anywhere. What can we do to get you past it?
- Please talk in a quieter voice.
- You've said that everything is all right but it doesn't feel that way to me.
- When you yell at me, I can't think, so please dial it down a notch.
- Please use your inside voice.
- I know you really want this to work as much as I do so let's agree to meet again tomorrow.
- I'm so glad we're finally having this conversation! It's really helpful!
- We both want the same thing, I think?
- Can I ask you why you say that?

- Let me ask you why you say that the way you did?
- What you said made me feel very uncomfortable.
- I can tell that this subject is upsetting to you, and I'm sorry.
- The frustration you're showing tells me you really care about this situation.
- Speaking calmly will make this conversation a lot more productive.
- Do you want to take a break so you can calm your emotions? I see how invested you are in this, and I want us to get this resolved, but a few more minutes won't hurt.
- This seems like a good time to stop and consider where this headed.
- You don't seem as excited about this as I am.
- I'm hearing a lot of frustration in your voice.
- Can we keep this on a professional level?
- We've worked together a long time so I know we can find a way around this.
- I've respected you for a long time, but have sensed that something is on your mind that I'm not aware of.
- I respect you and have always felt the same from you. Has anything changed?
- We've always been honest with each other. Let's keep that up.
- I think we both know that never happened.
- I think we both know that's not true.
- You can always come to me with issues like this before they get to this point.
- I'm here for you, and if you need more time to process what's happening, we can regroup later today or tomorrow.
- What's really bothering you about this issue?
- I sense there is something we haven't talked about yet that's on your mind. Please share.
- I never meant to offend you in any way!
- I'm sorry.

- Opinions vary, and getting upset isn't helpful. Let's take a break.
- Can we just stick to the facts and not get caught up with feelings? I think that will help us move toward a solution.
- Let's focus on the facts and not our different opinions. That will help us take at least a step forward.
- It took me by surprise when you said I'd hurt your feelings. Nothing about this situation is personal, and I'm sorry if that's what came across from me.
- I don't think it's going to do us any good to rehash this discussion, but I'd like to find common ground. Where do we go from here?
- I really think you enjoy stirring things up, and here's the consequences of that.
- Can we dial it back a notch?
- I understand why you find this situation so impossible to deal with.
- You're pushing awfully hard and I feel attacked. Can you cool it?
- Your sarcasm hurts me every time. Please stop.
- I apologize for speaking without thinking. I should have given more thought before I spoke, and I know I hurt you.
- I'm feeling very comfortable talking to you about this subject.
- It really helps me that you trust me with this.
- You're sounding uncharacteristically negative today. Is something bothering you?
- Can we deal with what's got you in this negative mood?

...But Never Say This!

“When they go low, we go high.”

—Michelle Obama

Resolving the conflict may be your intent, but that can quickly erode if you say the wrong thing. The phrases in this chapter are ones that you should **never** say. You may be frustrated and you may be tempted, but beware of the consequences if you utter these words. They will not resolve a conflict. Rather, they will fan the flames and ignite a firestorm. Even if you’re thinking them, don’t say them. Take the high road, take a deep breath, and **avoid** these phrases: • That is so stupid.

- That will never work!
- We’ve always done it that way. Why change now?
- Why should I listen to him?
- Are you a moron or something?
- I’m warning you.
- What exactly are you accusing me of doing?
- That’s ridiculous!
- You should talk.
- You’re such a nasty person!
- We’ve tried that before. It didn’t work.
- This is all your fault.
- You’re so difficult to work with!
- I told you to do it this way.
- What a bunch of idiots I have to work with.
- Such a loser!
- Why did you think that would work?

- You are so stupid!
- There's no reason to get so defensive.
- Stop acting like a child!
- I'm not paying any attention to you.
- I'm going to pretend I didn't hear you.
- You'll never get this done in time. You're so lazy.
- It can't be done that way!
- It has to be done this way.
- You're being ridiculous.
- Are you crazy?
- Now what are you complaining about?
- You just don't think!
- I know what you're going to say.
- What exactly are you implying? That I [e.g., sabotaged the meeting/project]?
- I don't want to talk about it.
- I don't care.
- What you should do is [xyz].
- That would be an excellent idea, except [xyz].
- That idea is totally unreasonable.
- You don't know what you're talking about.
- Just drop it!
- Why are you being such an [xyz]?
- It's none of my business, but [xyz].
- If you ask me, I think you should [xyz].
- I don't understand why you're having so much trouble with [xyz]. No one else ever has.
- Oh, it's nothing to worry about. It will work itself out.
- Now hold on a minute.

- That's impossible!
- Just stop bothering me with your nonsense.
- You're just too sensitive!
- Can't you just speak plain English?
- That jargon you always use is just stupid!
- You wouldn't really want to do *that*, would you?
- Okay, who messed up this time?
- You're entitled to your opinion, but [xyz].
- You can't tell me to do that!
- They can't make us do that!
- Do you expect that anyone will take you seriously?
- Do you realize what you just did? It was so wrong!
- This is such a stupid discussion.
- That is totally absurd.
- I told you not to do that!
- How could you possibly have done/said that?
- Who came up with such a stupid plan?
- Just keep your mouth shut!
- I can handle it. I don't need *your* help!
- You think you're so clever. You're not!
- Okay, here we go again.
- I told you there was a problem.
- What kind of a half-baked idea is that?
- Don't ask questions. Just do it.
- I'm in this to win.
- Don't keep telling me the same thing over and over again. I heard you the first time.
- I'm not naming names, but [xyz].
- Just saying!

- Just leave it. Someone will handle it.
- That was a monumental screw-up.
- As I told you before, [xyz].
- I can't believe that you would do/say that.
- I don't understand how you don't know that.
- Seriously, that's what you're worried about?
- What are you talking about? That's crazy.
- What's that supposed to mean?
- Shut up!
- You're wrong!
- You idiot!
- Who cares about that?
- I will never agree to that.
- Don't talk to me that way.
- Be quiet so I can tell you what we're going to do.
- I don't care what's right. This is how we do it here.
- I'm finished with this conversation and with you.
- You aren't the boss of me!
- That's a terrible idea.
- I told you so!
- I could care less about your position.
- I'm right and that's all I need to know.
- You're on your own here.
- You're too sensitive.
- What were you thinking?
- Lighten up!
- I'm not going to listen to anything else on this subject.
- Subject closed!
- That's off the table.

- I'm just not interested.
- Leave my office *now*!
- • Chill.
- Cool it.
- I'm outta here.
- I can't believe you just said that to me!
- Can you hear yourself?
- Are you listening to yourself?
- I'm not in the mood for your petty complaints.
- Sounds like you really didn't think that through.
- Do you always say the first thing that comes into your brain?
- You aren't making any sense.
- I've never liked you.
- I've never respected you.
- I don't like working with you.
- I don't want you on my team.
- You went too far this time.
- It's no wonder no one likes you here.
- Stop wasting my time.
- Are you trying to make me mad?
- You're obviously crazy!
- Don't bring me your petty problems.
- You either do what I say or get out!
- I won't tolerate dissent!
- Don't use that tone with me.
- Don't say something you will regret later.
- If you can't act like a professional, I won't deal with you.
- I won't lower myself to your level when you act like this.
- It's not always about you!

- Stop being so selfish.
- Sarcasm doesn't work on me.
- If anyone has an intelligent question, speak up. If not, we're done here!
- Here we go again!
- You really do have to be right all the time!
- Stop picking on me!
- You're lying.
- Lying isn't going to get us anywhere.
- I'd like to believe you but I just can't.
- Stop taking everything so personally.
- Stop being so sensitive.
- You need to have thicker skin.
- You're such a baby!
- You're too stupid to understand what's right in front of you.
- This isn't going anywhere.
- What a mess this has turned into. What now?
- Your hostility isn't helping us resolve this issue.
- Don't threaten me!
- Are you out of your mind?
- Are you trying to drive me crazy?
- Just stop it!
- You have no idea how much trouble you've already caused.
- If you continue to attack me, you leave me no choice but to push back.
- Why can't you just acknowledge our differences and leave it at that?
- I speak my mind, and I don't care if you don't like it. It's who I am.
- You heard me and understood me, so just acknowledge that I'm right!
- You can't talk to me like that.
- I won't stand for this anymore!
- If that's what you really believe, there's no reason to even continue this

conversation.

- Be quiet; you've already put one foot in your mouth. Don't tempt fate and end up with both feet in the same place.
- Talking to you makes me just plain tired/frustrated/angry/furious/sad.
- I give up. You win this one, but wait until the next time we meet.
- There's nothing more to say on this subject!
- You've said enough.
- We're done!
- I think you enjoy stirring things up, and now we're paying the price.
- Whatever!
- Duh!
- I feel like we've hit a brick wall and there's no way around it. We're done!
- I'm ending this conversation here and now!
- If I wanted your opinion, I'd have asked for it.
- This is really my problem.
- I don't care what you say, the answer is still no.
- Don't blind me with facts; my mind is made up.
- Don't push me!
- You're pushing too hard.
- Are you trying to pick a fight with me?
- Get out of my office and get out *now*!
- It's not my problem!
- I really don't care what you think/say/do.
- I'm so not in the mood to listen to you, so be quiet!
- You think you've got a problem? Listen to this one: [xyz].
- Heck, no! Don't want to hear it!
- Why would you even think I'd want to talk to you about this?
- Get out of my business!
- Leave me alone.

- Just shut up.
- That's the dumbest idea I've ever hear you come up with!
- Told you that wouldn't work, but no, you still had to do it!
- Don't expect me to fix it when you mess it up again.

A Helpful Excerpt from

The Essential Workplace Conflict Handbook

by Barbara Mitchell and Cornelia Gamlem

Whose Fight Is It Anyway?

“Knowing when to walk away is wisdom. Being able to is courage. Walking away with your head held high is dignity.”

—Anonymous

Remember The Hyde Company from Chapter 1? They moved into a new, wonderfully designed office building with open space to allow for collaboration and private meeting rooms. The well-designed work spaces allow for individual privacy. This is a huge change for the workforce who’d been working in private offices in their old building. Carlo and Bethany have workspaces next to each other. Bethany is having a difficult time adjusting to the new work environment and Carlo is not making things any easier. He has a loud voice that carries, constantly barges into her space, and interrupts her when she’s on the phone. She often goes into one of the small private meeting rooms to get away from him. The problem is those rooms have glass walls; Carlo can see her and seek her out for questions. Exasperated, Bethany goes to Sheila, their manager, and asks her to do something with Carlo because he’s creating a disruptive and hostile work environment.

Before she decides on a course of action, Sheila needs to learn the nature of Carlo’s behavior to determine if it might be some form of workplace harassment.

Assuming that harassment is not an issue in this situation, then she has to consider the following:

- Who owns this particular conflict?
- If she takes steps to resolve the problem, could she be perceived as taking sides with Bethany?
- If she steps in and exerts her authority, will Bethany miss the opportunity to develop her own conflict-management skills?
- As the company is encouraging more collaboration among its employees, will she dilute their ability to do so if she solves the problem for them?

Sheila is aware that Carlo’s voice projects, and in the open space, it can sound louder than he intends. Bethany, on the other hand, is often slow getting Carlo

what he needs, which frustrates him. What Sheila sees is a third story: a non-judgmental, unbiased view of what's occurring between Bethany and Carlo. Sheila has an interest in the conflict because it involves two of her team members, but she doesn't own it. She can, however, take some action to bring it to a resolution. She can act as a mediator.

Learning to Mediate

Mediators are third parties who help people solve their problems. They help people in conflict find their own solutions. Think of a marriage counselor, mutual friend or peer, HR professional, manager, or team leader—these are people who may be called upon because they have the vantage point of a neutral observer.

Mediation is facilitated negotiation and, as we pointed out in Chapter 7, negotiation is problem solving. Mediation is an approach to resolving conflict that does not involve an imposed solution. The people involved decide how the problem will be solved and any resolution achieved is consensual. One positive outcome of mediation is that it encourages communication. Everyone involved has an opportunity to better understand the other sides and the other stories. Additional issues may surface that provide greater insight. The exchange of information in a cooperative manner strengthens working relationships. Another positive outcome is that the process helps develop problem-solving skills for those involved in the conflict.

Sheila understands that, as a mediator, the option of resolving the problem herself is eliminated. The solution must come from Bethany and Carlo. She also understands that she has the ability to see the third story. She can describe the problem in a way that rings true for both of them.¹ She can move them toward a more collaborative relationship, which supports the company's goal. However, she has to remain objective.

Her next steps will be:

- Defining the business problem that's impacting the workplace and communicating that problem to Bethany and Carlo.
- Scheduling a meeting for the three of them and securing their agreement to attend.
- Defining roles at the beginning of the meeting. She has to be clear that she will be facilitating the discussion between the two of them, and not asking

questions or giving advice or opinions, even if she's asked.

- Setting guidelines at the beginning of the meeting. She'll want to encourage Bethany and Carlo to identify their individual interests, ask questions, and propose solutions. Once again, she'll have to be clear that she will not be asking questions nor proposing the solutions. Proposing solutions and agreeing on a resolution is their responsibility.

Who Owns the Conflict?

As we've been observing, workplace conflicts are not simple. The nature of each conflict is unique. There are often several underlying issues resulting in more than one conflict to be resolved. It's important to identify and separate the issues to determine who owns which conflict and how each is best resolved. A guiding principle—in fact a Golden Rule—of conflict resolution is that the problem should be solved by the individuals who own it. Remember Harrison from Chapter 4? He knew he had to have a difficult conversation with Louise and didn't hand it off to someone else.

Randall recently promoted Juanita into a supervisory role giving her responsibility for the work of one employee, Tricia. Juanita doubts that this is positive for her because she has no prior management experience and Randall is not very supportive. Randall told her that Tricia was “unmanageable.” Though Tricia is very good at customer service—she supports the organization's patrons and there's a desire by some to retain her—she doesn't take direction well and often has disagreements with her coworkers. If Juanita doesn't accept the promotion and manages her, Tricia will be without a job. Juanita is aware that Tricia has been moved around the organization a great deal. Within a matter of days, Randall advises Juanita that a complaint has been received about Tricia's attitude and that Juanita needs to handle it.

Does Juanita own this problem? Without more information about Tricia's employment history, it's difficult to pinpoint who owns it. Most likely, several people in the past failed to take ownership and passed it on. Unfortunately, it's all too common that problems are ignored, swept aside, or moved around, resulting in larger conflicts. It's very possible that this situation is just a symptom of a larger, systemic problem in this organization.

Renata has an abrasive personality. In meetings, she's especially aggressive, cutting people off when they are talking and making snide remarks about ideas that are presented. Recently, when she was having problems with her computer,

she stormed into IT and began to make accusations to Mark that he or someone else from IT had worked on her computer during the night. Before Mark could respond, she threw insults at him and stormed out. Mark sent an email to his manager about the incident, and his manager went to talk to Renata's boss, Albert. Albert is well aware of Renata's outbursts, but he is conflict averse. He has continued to tolerate her behavior because she's such a good performer—thorough, precise, and very creative. In desperation, he takes the situation to his director, Sergio, imploring him to handle Renata and the situation. Who owns this problem?

Sergio realizes that Albert is as much a part of the problem as Renata is. Albert has been failing to manage her behavior, and it's now time for Sergio to manage Albert's unwillingness to step up. Sergio explains that he sees their mutual interest in maintaining good working relationships among all the staff in a fast-paced environment and Albert agrees. Sergio points out that the organization has a policy that describes standards of conduct to which all employees must adhere, regardless of level of performance. There is also guidance on corrective action that should be taken to address inappropriate behavior.

The facts supporting Renata's behavior are clear. Mark's complaint, which he relayed in writing, is only one of several written complaints that have been received within the past three months. Clearly, Renata has not been working harmoniously with others and she has ignored feedback given by Albert, which could be considered as insubordination. There is more than enough probable cause to take management action in accordance with the conduct policy and place her on a final written warning advising her that, absent improvement in her behavior, further action will take place.

Recognizing that Albert owns the Renata problem, Sergio insists that Albert prepare the final written warning, with his assistance. He also insists that Albert, along with human resources, deliver it to Renata. He wants to remain in the background in order to discourage Renata from thinking that she can bypass Albert and come directly to him. Albert is reluctant, but he recognizes that he has to step up. He asks Sergio if they can get some coaching for Renata. Before he agrees, Sergio suggests that when Albert and Renata sit down, they do some brainstorming to determine how Renata might work on her attitude. Sergio wants Renata to claim ownership and responsibility of this problem. He wants her to be accountable and live up to expectations.

At the same time, Sergio recognizes that he owns the problem involving Albert's management skills. He suggests that they have a brainstorming session

Albert's management skills. He suggests that they have a brainstorming session of their own to come up with some ideas of how to help Albert be less conflict averse. They both own that problem.

I'm Not in It!

As it was yet another day in the cold winter when the county's schools were closed, Karina didn't have a choice but to telecommute. Fortunately, her organization had a liberal telecommuting policy. She had a report that her boss needed her to proofread and edit, and then send off to be printed for a meeting the next day. She knew she could have it finished to get it to printing by the 2:00 p.m. deadline. At 12:30 p.m., she emailed it to her boss as well as a coworker, Diego, whom she confirmed was in the office that day. Because the production team required a printed copy as well as a soft copy, Karina asked Diego if he could print the report and submit both the hard and soft copies to the production department by 2:00 p.m. She also left instructions regarding the number of copies she needed, the required binding, and her cell phone number in case there were any questions. Karina also received a confirmation that her email to Diego was delivered and read.

At 4:30 p.m., Karina called Diego to check on the status. Diego's voice froze. He'd been so busy covering for someone on sick leave that he never acted on Karina's request. Karina got extremely upset and began making nasty accusations. Diego responded in kind. At that point, their mutual boss approached and overheard the heated exchange. He'd been in meetings most of the day, but assumed that everything was under control. He was furious to learn what happened and threatened to write both of them up, but not before instructing Diego to call the production department's manager and see if they could get a rush on the job. They could, as long as they get it down right away; he'd have it the next morning in time for the meeting.

Next morning, the blame game between Karina and Diego continues. Brittany, who's always cheerful and concerned about others, sees Karina in the coffee room and asks if everything is okay. Karina lets loose with all of the details about what happened yesterday, pressing Brittany to plead her case to their boss. Brittany takes a step back, looks Karina in the eye and says, "Sorry, Karina, but I'm not in it!" Brittany has the good sense to realize that she didn't own this conflict. It's not her fight, and she doesn't want to be involved.

Know When and How to Intervene

Sheila and Sergio are modeling good behavior and setting good examples. Brittany should be recognized (and rewarded) for having the good sense to stay out of other people's conflicts. Knowing when and how to intervene is essential. Unfortunately, not everyone has good sense and that often creates rather than solves problems. Also, certain circumstances require specific actions whereas others require expert help. Let's look at some unique circumstances.

Until recently, Vivian has had a history of good performance as a claims reviewer and processor. She has received awards for her efficiency and low error rate, and is called on to help train new employees. Lately, however, her performance is slipping. She's processing fewer claims and her errors are increasing. Even worse, she's been impatient with her coworkers, snapping at them and accusing them of interfering with her work. Filipe has received the brunt of most of her accusations and his patience has run out. None of these changes have gone unnoticed by Tamera, her supervisor. Tamera knows that she's got to intervene and schedules a time to meet with Vivian.

Tamera starts the meeting by expressing concern about Vivian's declining performance. Before she can share her information, Vivian becomes very defensive and accuses Tamera of being unfair. "After all, I've had the best performance in the department for years. Doesn't that count? And Filipe, his mistakes are impacting my work!" she shouts. Tamera senses that there is something going on in Vivian's life that's contributing to these work problems. She is tempted to ask, but decides not to. Instead, she follows the guidance she has received in management training—stick to the facts. She presents Vivian with the statistics regarding her performance, pointing out that, yes, she'd done great work in the past and that is why there is concern. Tamera also describes several situations where she's observed Vivian making snarky remarks to her peers and shouting at Filipe. Tamera then says to her, "Vivian, I need you to get back on track before your performance goes below acceptable standards. I want to support you and help you correct these problems. That's why I've developed an improvement plan so we can both monitor your progress."

At that point Vivian bursts into tears and confesses that things aren't going well at home: Her husband has moved out, money is tight, and she can't afford to lose her job. Tamera silently sighs with relief, thinking that at least Vivian acknowledges that there is a problem. She tells Vivian that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a resource that can help with her personal problems. Although it's Vivian's decision to take advantage of that support, Tamera advises that she is going to make a management referral to the EAP for

Vivian based on her performance and behavior changes.² Vivian will still be accountable for improving her performance and behavior. Tamera made a wise decision to let the professionals at the EAP counsel Vivian because the underlying causes of her work issues are personal problems. Her responsibility is to continue to manage Vivian's work.

Rosario and Hilde have been working together for years. Friendly at work, they never see each other outside the workplace. Hilde notices some subtle changes in Rosario; she's not as upbeat and pleasant as usual. When she expresses concern about these changes in her disposition, Rosario confides that she's having problems with her teenage son. Hilde suggests she calls the EAP—in fact, presses her to do so. Rosario adamantly refuses. She doesn't want outside interference with personal problems. Hilde decides to call the EAP on Rosario's behalf and is told that the counselors can't assist unless Rosario calls directly—and in fact, they can't discuss Rosario's problem with her. Hilde is outraged and goes to human resources to complain that the EAP is not providing the service it should and insists that the company make a management referral to the EAP.

Was Hilde right to intervene? No, she doesn't own this problem. Unless Rosario is having performance or behavior problems that are affecting her work, there is no basis for a management referral and if there were, it would have to come from Rosario's manager, not Hilde. The EAP was correct in refusing to discuss Rosario's problem with a coworker.

Ivan's supervisor, Greg has been making unwanted and persistent sexual remarks and advances toward him. Ivan has asked for them to stop, but Greg always responds with flippant remarks like "Loosen up!" or "Chill out. I'm kidding." Exasperated, Ivan takes his concerns to Greg's manager, Mariana. Was Ivan correct in asking Mariana to intervene?

In this case, Greg's behavior—which included unwelcome advances and requests for sexual favors—can be described as sexual harassment and the company not only has a right to know, but a legal obligation to investigate Ivan's complaint.³ Ivan was not only correct in getting his manager involved in this conflict, it was his legal right to do so.

Savvy organizations recognize that conflict is not always bad. They recognize the characteristics of good conflict and leverage it into innovation and creativity. They encourage their employees to be accountable for their role in a conflict situation and give them the tools to manage and resolve their problems. They empower them to solve their own problems.

Essential Tips

- Problem solving does not inherently involve a top-down approach. It's not the manager's role to intervene every time employees clash.
- Solving employees' problems for them reduces collaboration and makes them dependent on their manager.
- Conflict can be change trying to happen. Help your employees develop conflict management skills.
- Conflict may not be essential in the workplace, but being accountable and solving your own problems is.
- Know when to intervene and know when to walk away.

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Are You Playing Nice in the Sandbox?

“All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten.... Play fair.... Don’t hit people.... Clean up your own mess.... Say you’re sorry when you hurt somebody....”

—Robert Fulghum

Remember a time when someone made you feel respected. Did they listen to you, giving you their undivided attention? Perhaps they valued your opinion even if it differed from their own. Did they provide feedback in an honest and nonjudgmental way? Did their actions show consideration? These are a sampling of workplace behaviors that are respectful.

Imagine an organization that defines its values through behaviors that exemplify them, where leaders and associates all live those values, and with no tolerance for disrespectful or disruptive behavior. If behavior stayed above the line of disrespect, issues such as harassment, discrimination, or worse would never occur.

Even in the best of organizations—those with strong and positive cultures—disruptive behaviors do occur. When they do, they affect working relationships. If disruptive behaviors are not addressed, they can spiral down a slippery slope and erode into bigger problems.

Deconstructing Disrespect

Disrespect is one of those words that can mean different things to different people. Like harassment, it’s often used when people are in conflict with each other. Employees may invoke the words “harassment” or “bullying” when, in fact, neither exist.

Jarrod is asked to update the department’s database. This specific task is not in his job descriptions; it’s someone else’s responsibility. So he protests and refuses to do it. After a heated exchange with his newly hired supervisor, he escalates his complaint to the department manager, saying that “the new guy” is

treating him disrespectfully. After receiving a written reprimand for insubordination, he claims harassment because he spoke up for his rights (not to do a newly assigned task). This is not an example of harassment. Jarrod may not like being asked to do this new task. He may not like his supervisor speaking to him in a tone that is less than warm or friendly. Although Jarrod may *feel* like he's being harassed because he's being asked to do something new, there's no basis for a legal claim of harassment.

Three months later when it's time for Jarrod's performance review, both his supervisor, Frank, and the department manager, Brian, meet with him. Jarrod is not happy with their feedback or with the plan for improving his work performance, which had slipped along with his behavior. He raises his voice, uses course language, refuses to acknowledge the performance improvement plan, and storms out, heading to human resources to claim that he was being bullied. However, neither discipline for workplace behavior nor negative performance feedback with requests for improvement is an act of bullying.

Let's consider the following definitions as we explore different types of disrespectful behaviors:

- **Microinequities** can be looks, gestures, inflections, or body language of a dismissive nature. They are subtle and may or may not be intentional or isolated incidents. They can be rooted in stereotypes.
- **Discrimination** occurs in the workplace when decisions are made or a person receives unfair differential treatment based on a particular characteristic. When the characteristic is protected by law, such as race or sex, the discrimination is illegal.
- **Harassment** is unwelcome conduct based on a particular characteristic, which may or may not be protected by law. If the behavior is based on a protected characteristic, it becomes unlawful when enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment; or the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.¹
- **Bullying** is the repeated infliction of intentional, malicious, and abusive behavior that interferes with a person's ability to do his/her work and is substantial enough to cause physical and/or psychological harm that a reasonable person would find it hostile or offensive.²
- **Workplace violence** is any act or threat of aggression that implicates the safety, security, or well-being of an individual who is at work.³

There is a relationship among all of these behaviors—atmosphere and working conditions—and the lines between them can be very thin.

Examining MicroInequities

The term “microinequities” was coined by MIT researcher Mary Rowe, PhD. They can include things like a weak handshake with little or no eye contact, listening with arms crossed, and looking at your watch, cell phone, or other device during presentations or while speaking with someone (unless you’ve been invited to do so). They have the effect of devaluing other individuals and negatively impacting feelings of inclusion and self-esteem. Employees who feel devalued or excluded disengage and their contribution is diminished.⁴

Remember Jacob from Chapter 4? He was hovering over Claire while she was on a client call, sending a message that he was unhappy that Claire didn’t put the call on hold. His behavior could be interpreted as controlling or menacing in some way—a more extreme, not-so-subtle microinequity.

Lori is one of two women on a team. She’s rather soft-spoken compared to George, who is very aggressive and makes sure his opinions are heard. He’s impatient with Lori’s thoughtful approach and will often roll his eyes or make snarky comments when she speaks, such as “Did you say something?” implying she has nothing to contribute. Pete, the project manager, tends to ignore George’s behavior because the two have many common interests. Several months into the project, Pete also starts ignoring Lori. Last week, Lori offered a technical solution to a vexing problem. Pete appeared not to be listening. When George offered the same solution, Pete responded with “Great idea, George.” Besides monumental bad judgment, is Pete guilty of anything more than a microinequity behavior at this point? Probably not yet.

What if Pete acted on George’s great idea and assigned him to lead a task force to address this vexing issue, passing Lori over for a developmental opportunity? The treatment is unfair to Lori. Pete’s behavior *could be* moving closer to discrimination.

Is This Harassment?

Workplace harassment, sexual or otherwise, can take many forms, including:

- Jokes or comments of a sexual nature or that disparage specific groups such as ethnic groups.

- Graphic images.
- Gestures or lewd actions.
- Introduction of inappropriate topics, such as those of a sexual or racial nature into business conversations.
- Unwelcome hugging, touching, or other physical contact.
- Specific comments about someone's body or physical characteristics.

Joey likes to tell jokes and keep everyone's spirits high at work. His jokes are lighthearted and never mean-spirited. When he spots Penny in the break room looking a bit down, he tells her a silly joke he heard about surfer dudes and blonds (Joey's hair happens to be blond). Penny smiles and laughs. Sally overhears this and gets upset, telling Joey that he's perpetrating the "dumb blond" stereotype and creating a hostile work environment toward women. (The surfer dudes were the brunt of the joke.) At worst, Joey may have been guilty of a microinequity, but the joke was neither severe nor pervasive enough that it would fit the definition of hostile work environment harassment.

Wendy had just joined the firm and found it odd when she began receiving emails with jokes and funny stories. When she asks about it, she's told, "We just try to keep things lively around here." There is nothing wrong with that; fun at work can be important. With time, however, the nature of the jokes begins to change, often becoming sexually suggestive or racially or ethnically pointed. Wendy finds them offensive and intimidating, making her uncomfortable. The behavior had eroded into hostile work environment harassment.

Before a meeting, Gene rolled his chair closer to Daria to look at her earrings, commenting they looked nice. She told him they'd been a gift from her boyfriend for her birthday. Later, he came into her office, pulled a chair very close, and told her she smelled nice and that her perfume was intriguing. Now she was growing uncomfortable. The next day he approached her and placed his hand on her shoulder, squeezed it firmly. Come to think of it, she'd seen him do this with other women: pay them compliments, then slowly move to behavior that was more personal and intimate. Clearly, Gene is exhibiting a pattern of unwelcome and unwanted behavior, in this case behavior of a sexual nature that is pervasive.

Where's the Bully?

Like harassment, workplace bullying can take many forms, including shouting,

screaming, or other verbal abuse; singling someone out for unjustified criticism or blame; excluding someone from work activities; purposefully ignoring work contributions; using language or actions that embarrass or humiliate; or, making jokes that repeatedly target the same person.⁶

Remember Renata from Chapter 9? Her behavior went beyond interrupting and making snide comments. Left unchecked, she could be especially aggressive. When confronting Mark with her accusations, she slammed a file onto his desk as she leaned forward and pounded her fist. Was she merely making sure that she, unlike Lori, was heard when she talked, or had she crossed that thin line and now was walking the path to becoming a bully?

Meanwhile, Wendy received an email one morning that was likely poking fun at Ian, a coworker. She could tell from the subject line it was yet another joke and she deleted it. Even more disturbing was when other associates started responding with seemingly mean-spirited comments. When she asked what was going on, Nicola responded, “We’re just having some harmless fun at Ian’s expense. After all, he can be difficult at times!” When workplace fun is targeted toward one individual or group of individuals, when it is one way and the targeted individual is not participating, and when it’s personal, such as comments about someone’s body type, it can quickly erode beyond disrespectful. In this case, the comments were cruel and many people were participating. The behavior was eroding and, if not addressed soon, was in danger of slipping to the level of bullying.

When Lars joined the organization, he was enthusiastically welcomed. Accomplished in his profession, he brought a great deal of expertise. His relationship with his peers and Lorraine, his manager, started positively. Just as he was getting comfortable in his new role, Lorraine’s attitude started to change. At first, she’d respond to his input in staff meetings with snarky comments and sarcasm, sometimes even belittling his work or his credentials. Then she started excluding Lars from meetings and, if questioned, responded that his presence wasn’t necessary. However, when he didn’t complete assignments that were discussed in the meetings—assignments about which he had no knowledge—she’d yell at him publicly, scathingly attacking his work and tossing humiliating insults. As if that wasn’t enough, she started making sly comments about him online. Others were quite surprised by her behavior and morale began to decline. Lorraine had realized that Lars’s qualifications and background far exceeded hers. She was intentionally being abusive, and she was creating a toxic work environment for everyone.

As Frank and Brian struggle to align changes in the department to those in their industry, Jarrod continues to challenge Frank. He questions him constantly about what process to follow, what changes will be made next, or how he should interact with Frank on assignments. He badgers Frank with emails, often as many as 25 per day. His questions and comments are filled with offensive language and are often accompanied by insults and shouts. Because of Jarrod's physical size and temperament, Frank is intimidated by both his presence and behavior. When Frank loses his composure and shouts back, Jarrod accuses him of bullying, when, in fact, he is the one engaging in the bully behavior.

Establish Boundaries

Boundaries have eroded as today's workplaces have become more relaxed and informal. Yet boundaries—those invisible lines that help define roles and manage interpersonal relationships at work—are important. Boundaries define limits—where you end and where others begin. They define responsibilities and foster accountability. Gene clearly crossed a physical boundary with Daria. Boundaries also define limits for language and communication. They are a close cousin to expectations.

Even in non-hierarchical organizations, boundaries at work establish clarity for job responsibilities and relationships such as who is responsible for giving job assignments and feedback. The reprimand that Jarrod received stated that his job description includes a provision for other related duties as assigned. It reiterated established responsibilities and relationships. The boundaries were clear.

Establishing boundaries also helps to differentiate between issues in our personal lives versus those in our professional lives. Maintaining a balance between openness and privacy, even in an era where social media is so prevalent, is important. Look at the difference between the following two statements:

- “I just moved to the area.” (Open statement.)
- “I just moved to the area, and my spouse and I fight now fight constantly.” (Private statement.)

If you're the recipient of too much information, be polite and nonjudgmental as you let it be known that the information makes you uncomfortable or is not an appropriate topic for work. You can use phrases such as:

- “I’m not comfortable talking about... [for example, personal issues].”
- “I don’t think this is an appropriate topic to be discussing at work.”
- “I don’t appreciate... [for example, that type of humor, those remarks or comments].”

Intent vs. Impact

Wendy’s colleagues started out to have fun. Did it matter that they didn’t mean for their behavior to be offensive or intimidating? Regarding sexual harassment, most courts have generally held that the effect of the conduct on the person who is on the receiving end determines if the conduct constitutes sexual harassment. The underlying premise comes from the reasonable-person standard. Would a reasonable person consider the conduct harassing, intimidating, and/or offensive? Men and women generally hold differing perspectives about behavior that could be sexual harassment. Thus, the courts have held that harassing conduct must be evaluated from the perspective of the victim.¹⁰

That’s the legal standard for determining unlawful harassment. Though not all disruptive behavior is harassment, it’s a good standard to use. In workplace conflicts, we may be tempted to assume the other person’s intentions from the impact their behavior has on us. We feel hurt, slighted, or dismissed—microinequities. We can’t know what their intentions are because they exist only with the other person.¹¹

Equally important, we can’t assume that despite our intention, our behavior won’t have a negative impact on others. We don’t know what other people’s sensitivities are. Ian may have been teased by older siblings as a child and the comments in the emails may bring back some painful memories.

Tatiana had an abusive stepfather with a fierce temper. He would often grab her arm, just to get her attention. As a result, she developed a very low tolerance for anyone touching her. Her coworker Roland had quirky mannerisms that included touching people on the arm or shoulder when he talked to them, which made many people uncomfortable. However, Roland didn’t seem to pick up on the signals people were sending. One day, in an attempt to get her attention, he grabbed Tatiana’s arm. She reacted and took a swing at him while her coffee cup was still in her hand, causing quite a scene as a shouting match between the two followed.

To avoid conflict, try to disentangle impact from intent. To frame your discussion with the other person, ask yourself three questions:

discussion with the other person, ask yourself three questions.

1. Actions: “What did the other person actually say or do?”
2. Impact: “What was the impact of this on me?”
3. Assumptions: “Based on this impact, what assumptions am I making about what the other person intended?”¹²

Priya and Jon are colleagues. During lunch one day, Jon leans over and tells her that he finds her exotic looks very sensual. Just then, the waitress returns with their change and Priya hurriedly grabs her things and says, “Time to get back to work.”

Later, Priya asks herself the three questions. Now she has a starting point for her conversation with Jon, which begins as follows: “Jon, I was surprised you made that comment at lunch. It was uncharacteristic of you and made me feel embarrassed. I could have assumed you did it purposefully so I’d be thrown off guard in the meetings we have to attend together.” Priya didn’t make any accusations. She related what he did and said (he can’t refute he made the statement), explained its impact on her, and stated *her* assumption of his intention. This gave Jon the opportunity to explain his actions in a non-threatening way.

Respectful Confrontations

There are many things that may motivate someone to behave in a disruptive manner. Is it narcissism (perhaps George or Jarrod?), low self-confidence (perhaps Lorraine?), or low emotional intelligence—just plain cluelessness (perhaps Roland?); or, an environment that turns a blind eye to such behavior (perhaps Wendy’s or Lori’s situation?). Just like with intent, it’s futile to try to figure out why. It’s more effective to determine the best approach to confront the situation and resolve the conflict.

Say “no” to a request or demand that is unwelcome, a behavior that is inappropriate or abusive, or a situation that is not fair. However, you also must make it clear that the behavior has to change:

- Describe the disruptive behavior.
- Explain the impact it had on you or others.
- Ask for the behavior to stop.

After giving Jon the opportunity to explain, Priya needs to ask that he stop

making personal comments. Wendy went along with the jokes from her coworkers until they reached the point of becoming offensive to her. She can explain that though the initial jokes were fine, the ones that are of a sexual, ethnic, or racial nature are not okay, that they make her uncomfortable, and to please remove her from the email list. She's not attacking the individuals sending the emails, but she is pointing out their behavior. In this case, because workplace harassment is involved, management intervention should take place.

When Gene admired Daria's earrings, he seemingly was making an innocent comment. When he remarked about her perfume, he crossed a thin line. Daria could have sent a direct but neutral message that the behavior was not appropriate: "It's okay to offer a compliment or admire a piece of jewelry. It's not okay to get close and comment on my perfume or scent. That behavior is creepy. Please don't do it again. If you want to have a conversation, please honor my personal space and don't get so close when you speak to me."

When Lorraine began disparaging Lars's work in meetings, he could have let her know that the comments were not okay with him: "Please stop! I can take criticism, but putting me down in front of other people is embarrassing for me, for you, and for everyone present. If you have issues with my work, let's talk privately."

When Ian became aware of the emails being sent with taunting comments about him, he could have confronted Nicola, who started the email chain, in a firm yet polite manner: "Please stop teasing me. It's disruptive and it humiliates both of us. If you have work issues with me, come and talk to me directly, but please don't try to have fun at my expense."

Roland's behavior caught Tatiana by surprise and rather than think, she reacted. It's unfortunate that no one said anything to him about his annoying mannerisms before the altercation. Once things calmed down, Tatiana explained her reaction: "Look, it's not okay to grab me. You're strong and you had a firm grip on my arm. Your actions were physically intimidating. Please refrain from touching or grabbing me in the future. If you want to get my attention, say something or send me a text or email."

All of these examples sent a strong, firm, yet polite message about the behavior, not the person. They were clear, feasible, positively framed, and respectful. All described the behavior and its impact and asked that it stop. All offered an alternative to the behavior—a constructive way that the relationships can continue in a manner where everyone feels respected. When all else fails,

bring it back to respect.

Essential Tips

- If relationships become damaged, they have to be fixed because they affect the entire workplace and the organization.
- When in doubt, think about the impact that your behavior may have on others.
- Employment discrimination laws don't guarantee a Utopian work environment or protect employees from personality or workplace conflict.
- When dealing with disruptive behavior, don't accommodate, don't avoid, and don't attack.
- Be hard on the problem and the behavior, but not on the person.

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About the Authors

In 2010, Career Press approached Barbara Mitchell about writing another book. She had previously co-authored *The Essential HR Handbook* with Sharon Armstrong. When the proposal was accepted, Barbara reached out to her colleague Cornelia Gamlem, with the offer to co-author *The Big Book of HR*. Drawing on their collective experience Barbara and Cornelia produced a great resource for HR professionals, managers, business leaders, small-business owners, and anyone who manages people. A writing partnership was born. Since its publication, they've written *The Essential Workplace Conflict Handbook* and *The Conflict Resolution Phrase Book*. They also collaborate on a weekly blog, *Making People Matter*. They are likely to write more books in the future.

Both Barbara and Cornelia are influencers to the HR and business communities. They are frequent speakers to business groups and have been quoted in major publications including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, *Fortune*, and the *New York Times*. Since writing *The Big Book of HR*, they have been interviewed in major markets around the country and contributed articles to numerous blogs and websites.

Barbara Mitchell is an author, speaker, and the managing partner of the Mitchell Group, a human resources and organizational development consulting practice. She consults with a wide variety of clients on issues around people—helping them successfully hire, develop, engage, and retain the best talent available. Most of her HR career was spent in senior leadership positions with Marriott International, Human Genome Sciences, and as co-owner and principal of the Millennium Group, LLC.

She entered the HR profession after gaining a strong business foundation and says, “Working in HR was like coming home. I’d found what I was meant to do!”

Barbara has actively given back to the HR profession in a variety of ways. She served on the board of directors of the Employment Management Association, a professional emphasis group of SHRM, and has been president of several SHRM chapters.

She is graduate of North Park University, Chicago, Illinois, with a degree in history and political science. She has taken graduate level business courses at UCLA, the University of Denver, and Loyola University.

Barbara is a video presenter/docent at the Smithsonian's American Art Museum and is a past member of the executive committee of the board of directors of the Northern Virginia Habitat for Humanity affiliate.

Cornelia Gamlem, SPHR, is an author, consultant, and speaker. She is founder and president of the GEMS Group Ltd., a management consulting firm that offers human resources and business solutions. Prior to founding the firm, she served in a senior HR leadership role with a Fortune 500

IT services company with a global presence. She likes to say that she's been in HR since "God was a girl."

Cornelia has served on national task forces that influenced public policy and testified before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on three occasions. She served on SHRM's National Board of Directors, chaired its Workplace Diversity Committee, and sat on its Global Forum Board of Directors. She has supported HR professionals by serving as an instructor at number of colleges in the Washington, D. C. metro area. She has written many articles and white papers for professional and industry publications.

She is a graduate of Marymount University, where she earned a master's degree in human resource management and California State University, Sacramento, where she earned her undergraduate degree in business administration. She achieved Life Certification as Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) from the Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI).

Stay connected with Barbara and Cornelia:

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www.essentialworkplaceconflicthandbook.com

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Other Books by These Authors

Barbara Mitchell and Cornelia Gamlem:

The Big Book of HR

The Essential Workplace Conflict Handbook

Barbara Mitchell and Sharon Armstrong:

The Essential HR Handbook