



The Customer Communicator Web Extra



How to approach a conflict situation

Renée Evenson, author of *Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People*, offers these five essential steps for use in approaching a conflict situation with a boss or coworker. She adds that this approach can also be used to mediate group or team conflicts or disagreements.

■ **Step One: Think first.** “If you don’t take the time to think about the situation, you are likely to say something wrong and get the other person on the defensive, get them upset, and get yourself more upset,” says Evenson. “And when that happens, you will not resolve the conflict.”

So, take whatever time is necessary to get control of your emotions and play through the conversation in your mind. Consider all perspectives and imagine what your supervisor or coworker will say in response to your comments. “You can even rehearse the things you want to say and the points that you want to get across with a friend or trusted coworker,” Evenson says.

■ **Step Two: Gain a better understanding.** “In this step, you are trying to open a constructive dialog,” Evenson says. “And you always want to start that with an ‘I’ phrase to describe how the other person’s behavior affected you.” Using an “I” phrase puts the focus on you rather than on the other person. It keeps the conversation non-judgmental — “and it helps the other person to understand where you are coming from,” she adds.

“I” phrases include statements like, “I was upset by the comments that you made about my work, and I wonder why you said that?” Or, “I get flustered when you are abusive like that, and that affects my conversations with customers, so I wonder why you do that?” When you put something in those terms, Evenson suggests, the other person is less likely to become emotional or defensive.

■ **Step Three: Define the problem.** The point of this step is to make sure that everyone involved has a correct understanding of the problem — that the other person understands your point of view, i.e., how their behavior made you feel. And that you understand what might have motivated their behavior. So, restate the problem from your point of view, ask the other person how they view the problem, then paraphrase to see that all parties view the problem in the same way.

■ **Step Four: Offer your best solution.** “You’ve thought about it beforehand, and you know how you want this other person to treat you going forward, and you know what your best resolution is, so throw it out there,” Evenson says. “Say, ‘This is how I would like us to resolve this issue.’”

But keep in mind at this point that it’s not all about being right. “The other person might have a different viewpoint and an alternate solution,” says Evenson. “So be ready to remain flexible and try to work together to come up with the best solution.”

■ **Step Five: Agree on the resolution.** In this step you want to restate what everyone has agreed to. “But remember that this might involve some compromise on your part to reach a workable solution,” Evenson says. “It’s about finding the solution that’s best for all involved, even if it means backing down somewhat and not getting your way completely.”

