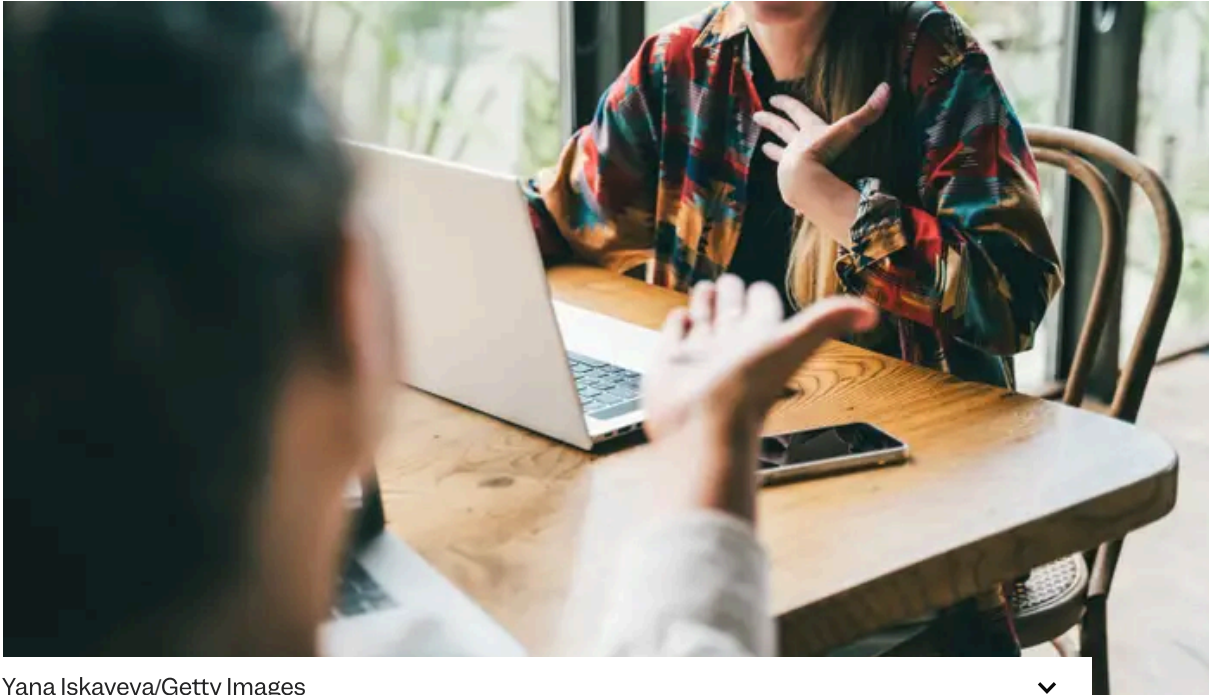


CAREERS

Tips for handling conflicts in the workplace, according to experts

[Sarah Jackson](#) Feb 9, 2025, 3:49 AM CT



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- **It's never pleasant, but it happens sometimes: You find yourself in conflict with someone at work.**
- **How do you best address it?**
- **Experts shared with BI their tips for tactfully handling disagreements with coworkers.**

It's an uncomfortable situation: having a conflict at work.

How do you handle it?

There's not always an easy solution, but there are steps you can take to try to defuse difficult situations.

When emotions are running high, remember to "take a deep breath and pause for a moment," says Lisa Richey of [The American Academy of Etiquette](#).

"So many of us are so quick to react," she told BI. "Take time to understand why the other person may be bringing up a particular issue. The only thing that we can control is the way we react to it in the moment. You have to be fully responsible for yourself."

It can also be a good idea to keep your discussions out of earshot or view of people not involved in the situation.

"Address it later, one-on-one with the person," Richey said. "Do not get into these heated conversations and battles within the conference room as a group."

Arden Clise of [Clise Etiquette](#) also emphasized having a "calm, respectful conversation."

Consider sticking with ["I" statements](#), which express your perspective or feelings about something, versus "you" statements, which can carry an accusatory or combative intonation — and if you're at fault for something, apologize.

John Eliot, organizational psychology professor at Texas A&M University, writes in his forthcoming book ["How to Get Along With Anyone"](#) that many people fall into one of five personality styles regarding [how they behave in conflicts](#).

"If you take a few minutes to really understand yourself, then you're equipped to know what types of office conflict you'll naturally be good

at and what you'll struggle at, and that's half the battle," he said. "The other half of the battle is take some time to figure out the style of the people you're working with."

In a conflict, Eliot suggests considering the other person's conflict style and what it is they're looking for.

"We don't have to agree, we don't have to solve the problem, we don't even have to have the same opinions on things," he said. "But if I know one or two things they're looking for, I can brainstorm a way to give them one of those things so that we can diffuse emotion. Once the emotion is diffused, then you can get back to having a more rational conversation with one another."

Practicing active listening in a disagreement can help "bring people together even if we disagree," says Eliot.

"We all have a need to feel heard and feel understood," he said. "Make sure you're understanding what they're saying and then feed some of that back a little bit. That's an active way to let them know, 'This person really is listening to me.'"

If an argument is getting heated, try setting a calmer tone yourself, and the other person may follow, Eliot said.

Simply slowing down the pace of your discussion can also help defuse tensions.

"Just taking a second to slow down in the way you talk, that will slow down an interaction," says Eliot. "In basketball, we take a 30-second timeout with our kids, and it brings emotions down. If what you are

going to say would normally take you two seconds, and you take 15 seconds instead of two, then you're infusing the spirit of a timeout into a conversation."

And sometimes, there's no satisfactory win-win or compromise to a conflict at work. In those cases, sometimes you just have to pick your battles. Because at the end of the day, they'll still be your coworkers tomorrow.

So if being the bigger person means you have to lose the battle (but hopefully win the war of working together harmoniously longterm), "just remember that we are working together," says Clise.

"We need to maintain good relationships with the people we are working with."

Work