

## 3 Tips To Support You When You're In Conflict

By Anna Shields, Consensio, 29 April 2022

When facing difficulties in a work or personal relationship, leaning on a trusted colleague or friend for support can be useful. In my job as a workplace mediator, I help employees navigate tricky workplace situations. Yet I still encounter conflict in my own life. Recently, when I turned to people I trust to talk things through, I was reminded of how mixed and challenging that support can be. Three different people, three different responses.

Conflict always offers an opportunity for learning. For me, this particular experience gave me some insights that I want to share as they will be helpful for others who reach out for support during times of conflict.

### Grappling with a difficult situation

To give a bit of context, I felt that a close friend had let me down. My friend didn't appear to register what had happened, or notice how it affected me. This left me surprised, confused, and hurt. I played what had happened over and over in my head. I lost sleep over it, and I couldn't see things clearly.

What I wrestled with most was whether to bring it up with my friend or not, and the potential consequences of doing so. This is an important friendship to me, so I didn't want to damage it. But I also didn't want it to fester away and affect our relationship in the long term. So, to help work it through, I turned to three people close to me for support. The results were very different.

### Three different responses

The first person I talked to was quick to advise me to leave the situation alone. They wanted to be helpful and grasped my predicament and the potential implications. But I found myself getting more agitated during our conversation, and felt I had to defend my position. I came away feeling that I hadn't been fully listened to, and my perspective hadn't been validated.

Talking to the second of my selected confidantes was a different experience. They too appreciated what was at stake. They listened, they were interested, and they were sympathetic. I felt they gave me time and a created safe space where I could express myself fully and without judgment, much as a mediator would do. The next day they called me back, having taken time to reflect, which further underlined their care. After thinking it through, they too felt that I shouldn't say anything, but I still felt stuck with no obvious way forward despite the time and attention they'd given me.

Now to the third. This person knew me well but didn't know the other person involved. Again, they recognized my dilemma and were caring and considerate. But this time, by the depth of listening and style of their questions, reflecting back and meeting me where I was in that moment, they helped me see new perspectives to the situation. This is a great example of how to help someone

struggling with conflict. I came away from this conversation understanding the situation more clearly. I now realized that I didn't want to talk to the other party because I didn't need to, and I was happy with that decision.

### **Making the most of support from others**

Reflecting on these conversations and their outcomes, leads me to three insights to help you get more benefit from the support of others, either at work or in your personal life.

#### ***1. Think about what you need***

After many years as a conflict management professional, I have good self-awareness regarding how I am in conflict. I know that when I'm ruminating over something, it's a sign that I need to deal with it. For me, it takes time to work through conflict. So I tend not to go with a knee-jerk reaction. Taking my time tends to reveal more options for me. Others may prefer to go with gut feelings and act more quickly. What's important is knowing what suits you, and how your approach will benefit the situation.

#### ***2. Communicate your needs***

Communicating what you need – and don't need – from your confidante, increases the chance that you will have a helpful conversation. On reflection, if I had expressed to the first person what I needed, I wouldn't have had such a frustrating conversation. It's ok to say that you don't want advice and just want to be listened to. Explain that you need some dedicated time from them and check if they can give you that.

#### ***3. Be open to different insights***

After talking to my third confidante, I felt a huge sense of relief. I felt relieved because I had made a decision, and I knew there wouldn't be a difficult conversation ahead. My last confidante helped me to recognize that the conflict was within myself. The real power was that I regained a sense of perspective and clarity.

Conflict can be complicated, even for trained mediators like myself. Navigating conflict is a journey of lifelong learning. The path to resolution often comes from opening ourselves up to other perspectives, and taking time to explore those. Sometimes we can do this by ourselves, whilst other times we benefit from turning to others. I'm grateful to all three of my confidantes (although particularly to the third), and I hope to have the opportunity to support them in return.