



## Brewing Harmony: 3 Peace-Making Tips On National Tea Day

By Anna Shields, Consensio, 21 April 2023

It's the UK's National Tea Day today. Tea-loving Brits, and indeed millions of people in homes and workplaces around the globe, will be brewing the world's second most popular drink. At work though, it's not just tea (or coffee) that can get stirred up. Conflict commonly occurs amongst co-workers, and failure to address issues early and informally can lead to increased stress and disruption for everyone involved.

"Make Tea Not War," Monty Python's famous declaration, might appear flippant, but mediators will tell you that the phrase holds some valuable insights. Based on the experience of workplace mediators, here are three tips that can help bring harmony when conflict is boiling over at work.

### Change of scene

Talking to a colleague about a difficult issue can feel daunting, especially when the discussion is held in the same location where the conflict arose. To address this, the first tip is to think about *where* a conversation should take place. In workplace mediation, for instance, discussions occur in a private, neutral setting, with regular breaks, giving parties the space and time to rest and reflect.

Having a challenging conversation in a different environment, such as a chat over a cup of tea, changes the setting away from the source of a conflict, and keeps the conversation private, away from the eyes and ears of other colleagues. There's also a symbolic benefit of going somewhere else – it can signify change and movement, which can help open the way to fresh thinking.

### Time for tea

It takes time to resolve conflict. When a dispute has been brewing for a while, those involved tend to hold on tightly to their positions and become entrenched in their viewpoints. The second tip is to recognize *when* time is needed for a longer conversation, and not to rush a tea and chat. To be able to move forward, people need time to have their say, share their feelings, and be heard.

Even in a conflict that's just flared up, there's value in pausing. "Let's pick this up again over a tea later," gives both parties time to take a breath, gain control of their emotions, and reflect on what was said in the heat of the moment. This creates an opportunity to come back together more calmly and with a clearer perspective.

### A caring cuppa

As simple as it may seem, the act of asking someone for a conversation over a cup of tea can have a powerful impact. It communicates care and respect for the other person and the relationship, which can open the door to a constructive conversation.

The final tip is to consider *how* you want to come across in your conversation. To demonstrate your care for a colleague, you might ask how they felt about what happened, or what impact a situation has had on them. You may want to show that you are open to their perspective by using open questions and deep listening techniques.

This can be taken a step further, by proactively seeking opportunities for informal interaction with colleagues, to help build stronger working relationships. When there is a foundation of trust, it is easier to navigate conflict, and challenges in those relationships can become opportunities to get to know ourselves and our colleagues better.

Not every conflict can be solved by a cup of tea, especially if the issue is long-standing. However, in many workplace mediation cases, parties often reflect that they wish they'd just gone for a cup of tea when the issue first arose. On National Tea Day, if everyone who felt trouble brewing took this simple step, whether virtually or in person, maybe more issues would just turn out to be a storm in a teacup.