



3 Questions To Resolve Conflict The Human Way

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With AI now woven into daily life, it's tempting to turn to it for quick answers, including when dealing with something as complex as conflict at work. Tools like ChatGPT can be prompted to spot patterns, ask questions to resolve conflict, and even anticipate future disputes. Yet, a workplace mediator will tell you that when it comes to navigating relational issues, there's no substitute for a human approach. If you would like to get better at resolving conflict, here are three helpful questions you can ask yourself.

3 Key Questions For A More Human Approach To Conflict

Q1: How can I see more nuance?

When people are in relational conflict, they tend to assign fixed roles – such as the villain or the victim, the winner or the loser – to help make sense of what is happening. Yet casting someone as “good” or “bad” simplifies and reduces the other to a label, and overlooks the many varied facets that are part of their personality. When you approach a conflict with this reductive mindset, you stop being curious about the other person and the motivations behind their behaviour. You also lose sight of the fact that there are always multiple perspectives to a conflict.

To shift to a more human mindset in conflict start by asking “How can I be more nuanced in my views?” Instead of casting roles, try looking a little deeper: Why might my colleague be acting in this way? What part of the situation am I not seeing? Although we disagree on some things, are there elements we do agree on? Notice contradictions, uncertainties, or even qualities that surprise you. With this mindset, it's more likely that you will get a wider view of the whole person and the broader situation.

Q2: How can I show more compassion?

Conflict can stir up deep emotions in all of us, such as feelings of upset, anger, or even trauma. Just over one in three UK employees face conflict at work each year, according to the CIPD, and for over half of them (56%), the experience leads to stress, anxiety, or depression. Entrenched conflict can feel all-consuming and takes a heavy toll on our mental and physical health. It can be understandably difficult to take a step back and see the conflict from a perspective different to our own.

This is where being more human means asking yourself the question: “How can I show more compassion towards the other person involved in this conflict?” In workplace mediations, breakthroughs often happen when people are able to show empathy for the other person. They realize that they aren't the only person who has sleepless nights ruminating about the situation, or that their colleague also dreads their weekly team calls. Acknowledging the shared impact in a

psychologically safe space, with the time to explore the underlying issues that have resulted in the relationship breakdown, enables all sides to move beyond their conflict.

Q3: How can I move towards conflict resolution?

In conflict, it's easy to slip into binary thinking. People can become so focused on a desired end goal – such as being proved right, or getting an apology – that it becomes a zero-sum game: one person's win comes at the cost of another's loss. Neither party is satisfied with the outcome: the one who "loses" feels hurt, resentful, or dismissed, and often, the "winner" doesn't reap the anticipated rewards either. Workplace mediators are used to this outcome, which is especially common after grievance procedures, where even a favorable outcome for one party can still leave both sides feeling aggrieved.

There is an alternative mindset here too. Instead of obsessing over the destination, you can make the journey the goal. So, the third of our questions to resolve conflict is, "How can I move towards resolution?" By asking yourself this question, the focus switches to learning and opens up multiple possibilities rather than a singular outcome. Indeed, in workplace mediation, people often discover that the apology they initially longed for isn't as important as they thought. Successful relationships, whether at work or at home, aren't zero-sum – they thrive on mutual benefit, where the outcome is greater than the sum of its parts.

Use These Questions To Shift Your Conflict Mindset

In conflict, as in life more generally, situations are rarely black and white. Conflict is full of subtleties, learning as you go, and changing direction when needed. When it comes to questions to resolve conflict, AI might be able to offer speedy responses, but the real answers lie within our uniquely human and complex selves. By staying curious, compassionate, and committed to the journey, you will not only navigate conflict more effectively but also strengthen your relationships along the way.