

Squash the Drama: 5 Steps to Properly Handling Interoffice Conflicts

By Kristina Schneider, Executive Assistant



It's a fact in just about every single office, conflict is going to happen. There are times the workplace is going to be stressful. There are going to be different people with different personalities and with a lot of different things going on in both their personal and professional lives. Regardless of what industry you're in, but especially in an estate, tax or financial planning practice, what is inevitable is that, at some point or another, there will be conflict.

Knowing and implementing the steps to properly handle this conflict, while they may seem obvious and common sense, is not always a common practice. When not properly handled (or worst yet, left unhandled), the end result is this: conflict escalates and becomes office drama, which then leads to office gossip and possibly a huge blow-up in the office. This all comes at the expense of office morale, work productivity, and potentially even your job with your employer! A lose-lose situation for everyone involved!

STEPS TO RESOLVING INTEROFFICE CONFLICT

The following steps are provided to you for your consideration in constructively resolving interoffice conflict. While not always possible, given the culture or dynamics in your office, they are tested solutions that will help get you on the road to successfully resolving the conflict.

- **Step #1: Direct Adult One-on-One Communication.** Most conflict in the office occurs from a misunderstanding with a colleague. Often times, things are said or done that are misinterpreted or mistaken to mean things they're not. Rather than having these things bottled up, boiling deep down inside, causing you to become more angry or resentful about the situation, sit down with the individual directly and talk to them. It

is better to speak with them because written communication can be easily misinterpreted and may not resolve the issue. Put your big girl panties (or big boy undies) on and sit the other person down in a private area and talk to them! When doing so, be sure that you've calmed down before confronting them and also be conscientious of your wording. Avoid "you" statements, which will most likely result in a defensive response and will not result in the outcome you desire.

By confronting the person directly, more often than not, you will discover that the other person was not even aware of what they did and how it affected you. They will also appreciate your respectful and professional way of bringing it to their attention, rather than going over their head to their supervisor or management. Sure, nobody likes confrontation. But, even more than that, nobody likes an office gossip that might go around talking about them behind their back and forming alliances against them in the office. Which, leads me to...

- **Step #2: Don't Be a Gossip!** There's only potentially two people that are necessary to talk about the conflict with. The person that you're having a conflict with or

someone higher up in management that can help resolve it (if Step #1 didn't work out). It doesn't need to be a topic of conversation with other members in the office. This will only create further conflict as people begin to form opinions and judgment against others.

- **Step #3: Let It Go!** In the words of Disney's blockbuster movie, *Frozen*, "Let it go... let it go...". Sometimes you have to learn to do just that and let it go. This is not always easy to do, but here are some mantras that are helpful with learning to let go:
 - The Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."
 - "Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about."

Lastly, it's good to remember that most of your colleagues want the same thing you do. They want to be respected, appreciated, compensated fairly, and to see the company succeed. Therefore, it is a fair assumption that most people have the best of intentions. However, as is the case with all people (yes including you!), having good intentions does not mean that your words or actions always reflect them appropriately.

Be forgiving and accepting of others. It doesn't mean you should ignore the conflict in the office, though. If you truly cannot let it go, then consider Step #4...

- **Step #4: Get a Mediator.** Having a neutral, third-party person to serve as a mediator is a great way to help resolve the conflict. The bigger question for most people on this one is, *who?* A lot of estate planning practices lack a go-to figurehead like an office or human resources manager. If that's the case in your office, it might have to be the boss (attorney, financial advisor, CPA, president or whomever you report to and that serves in some kind of management position).

If you're the boss and you're reading this article, this is why it's so important to have an office manager position in your firm to handle these kinds of issues that are better dealt with on an administrative level than with you! Additionally, there are times where there may be conflict between you and that individual, so another great idea is to consider having a business coach that specializes in the area of conflict-resolution. The amount of money to bring in a coach like this is worth it,

otherwise, the true cost to you is having an office drama bring down morale and productivity and potentially causing individuals to leave your firm. Your time and money spent finding, hiring, and training employees is an often overlooked expense and value to your practice worth considering when evaluating the expense of hiring a business coach. (If you would like a referral to a business coach that specializes in this, contact us at 1-866-754-6477 or e-mail us at info@ultimateestateplanner.com.)

- **Step #5: Take Care of Yourself.** It is important that you take care of yourself - - ALWAYS! This can be anything, from making sure that your work environment is safe and that you don't feel like you're being threatened or in harm's way. It can also mean to make sure that you're not burning out and that you're taking your rest days (weekends and vacation days). Everyday tasks, such as getting enough sleep, diet and physical activity. And, even big picture, deciding whether or not this job is right for you. Life is too short to be at a workplace that is full of drama and stress. If you cannot get a resolution to the interoffice conflicts you have, perhaps it's a sign that *you* might be better off somewhere else.

Hopefully, some of the above steps have given you some insightful ideas on how to handle conflict. It's important to remember that conflict is bound going to happen. But, as you can see that when conflict is handled properly, it does not need to be a silent (or sometimes not-so-silent) killer of your workplace!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kristina Schneider is the current Executive Director of The Ultimate Estate Planner, Inc. She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Pepperdine University in 2004 and was hired right out of college to work for the Law Firm of Kavesh, Minor & Otis, coordinating and facilitating Philip Kavesh's "Missing Link" Boot Camps while also providing administrative support to Mr. Kavesh as his Executive Assistant for over 7 years. With a combined almost fifteen years of administrative experience and her direct experience working at Mr. Kavesh's law firm, Kristina has been able to assist numerous estate planning professionals through The Ultimate Estate Planner, Inc. And, equally as important, she has assisted the executive assistants and staff members of many of these estate planning professionals to provide better service and support. You can reach Kristina at by e-mail at kristina@ultimateestateplanner.com.



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