

The Top 10 Tips on Managing Conflict, Emotional Tension & Anger

By Claire Albright

To be a safe and predictable person for those around you at work and at home, it is essential that you are able to maintain your composure when you feel like your 'buttons' are being pushed. This strength will help you to achieve your goals in business as well as your goals for your personal relationships.

1. Share negative emotions only in person or on the phone. E-mails, answering machine messages, and notes are too impersonal for the delicate nature of negative words. What feels like a bomb on paper may feel like a feather when delivered in person.
2. Pepper your responses with the phrase, "I understand". This phrase will support your goals when the tension is high and you need to find common ground to form compromises or agreements with the other party.
3. Take notice when you feel threatened by what someone is saying to you. Resist the temptation to defend yourself or to "shut down" the other person's communication. It will take this kind of discipline to become an open, trusting communicator.
4. Practice making requests of others when you are angry. It is often much more useful to make a request than to share your anger. For example, if the babysitter is driving you crazy by leaving dirty dishes in the sink, it is better to make a request of them than to let your anger leak out in other ways such as by becoming more distant.
5. Try repeating the exact words that someone is saying to you when they are in a lot of emotional pain or when you disagree with them completely. This mirroring technique can keep both the speaker and the listener 'centered' in a difficult conversation, especially when the attitude of the person doing the mirroring is to gain understanding of a different point of view.
6. Take responsibility for your feelings to avoid blaming others. Notice when 'blameshifting' begins to leak into your speech. "I feel angry when you are twenty minutes late and you don't call me" is much better than, "You make me so mad by being late."
7. Learn to listen to the two sides of the conflict that you are in as if you were the mediator or the counselor. If you can listen and respond in this way you will bring peace and solutions to the conflict more quickly. For example, in response to an employee's raise request, you might say, "On the one hand I understand that you really need the raise, and on the other hand I represent the company, whose funds are very scarce at this time. Is there a way that I can work on your compensation package that does not involve cash?" Here, the mediator's point of view can look for the creative compromise that takes into account the limits and the needs of both parties.
8. Take a playful attitude towards developing the skill of emotional self-control in high conflict situations. You could view maintaining self-control in a tense, angry conversation as an athletic feat. You could also view developing this skill as similar to working out at the gym with weights - the more that you use your self-control muscle the bigger it will grow and the easier it will be to remain calm when tension is great.
9. Wait a few days to cool down emotionally when a situation makes you feel wild with intense feelings, such as rage. As time passes, you will be able to be more objective about the issues and to sort out the truth about the situation more clearly.
10. Make a decision to speak with decorum whenever you are angry or frustrated. If you give yourself permission to blow up, people will not feel safe around you. They will feel that you are not predictable and will carry 'shields' when they are near you. The fear and walls of others will not support your goals for success in relationships or at work.