

## Effective Conflict Resolution

The dictionary defines conflict as “a state of disagreement & disharmony; clash”. Conflicts can arise in a Communications Center at many different levels. There can be conflicts between the call-taker & the caller or conflicts among employees on shift.

Most verbal conflicts start because one or both of the participants is listening and responding emotionally rather than intuitively and intellectually. Responding emotionally is like adding fuel to a fire – it only serves to further inflame an already volatile situation. Here are five listening techniques you can use to apply an intuitive & intellectual response to verbal conflicts.

**1. Listen to the speaker’s whole message before forming an opinion or formulating a response.** Do not filter the message and form opinions & responses on only those elements you agree or disagree with.

**2. Listen to the intent of the message objectively.** Do not use preconceived opinions or biases to jump to assumptions about the intent of the speaker.

**3. Do not react emotionally to the speaker’s nonverbal communications.** Remain professional and controlled.

**4. Listen to the speaker non-judgmentally & with empathy.** Respect the speaker’s point of view, even if you disagree with it. Keep the communications channels open. Try to encourage the speaker to come up with an acceptable solution to the problem/conflict.

**5. Present your position in a clear and concise manner.** Make sure you communicate your understanding of the conflict/problem and the reasoning behind your



position. The speaker may not agree or particularly like your position however s/he will know it was reached fairly based on an objective understanding of the issues presented.

The application of these five techniques can significantly assist in defusing verbal conflicts. In addition, there are other conflict resolution techniques that may be used depending on the situation.

### **Conflict Resolution between the Calltaker & the Caller**

Conflicts between the call-taker and the caller have the potential to occur when the call-taker is faced with an argumentative or difficult caller. The best technique the call-taker can use to defuse a potential conflict situation is to remain focused, PROFESSIONAL and calm. This means:

- 1. Never argue with the caller.** Gather the pertinent information relative to the event being reported and do not allow yourself to be drawn into an argumentative dialogue with the caller. Always remember – it takes two to have an argument.
- 2. Control your emotions.** It may be difficult when trying to deal with an individual determined to create a conflict, but keep your emotions in check. Responding in anger to an already angry individual only escalates the situation. Remain professional – try not to take it personally – **Remember – you are not the problem, you are part of the solution.**

### **Conflict Resolution Among Employees on Shift**

Whenever you have groups of individuals working in close contact, particularly in a stressful environment, conflicts of some sort are inevitable. Little “spats” responsibly handled by the involved parties are normal and can at times serve to “clear the air”. However, when individual conflicts reach the point where they affect Center morale and productivity, supervisory intervention is required. Here are the steps a supervisor should follow to resolve a conflict among employees.

- 1. Meet privately with each party involved.** Listen to both sides carefully to make sure you understand each point of view & why the conflict has occurred.
- 2. If necessary, do an independent review** – try to seek out the root cause of the problem.



- 3. Determine a solution that serves the best interests of the parties involved and the Center.**
- 4. Bring the parties together and clearly present your understanding of the conflict/problem.** Make every effort to get each party to understand the others point of view and mutually agree on an appropriate solution to the problem.

**5. If the parties cannot agree on an appropriate solution, clearly & concisely explain the solution you have determined.** Stress that your decision is based on a fair & balanced analysis of the facts and the solution you are imposing is in the best interests of both the parties and the Center.

There may be instances when the conflict is based on some unspecified dislike. There is no easy solution to this type of conflict. When two individuals dislike each other, there is no magic formula to make them suddenly become friends. Two or more employees in “open warfare” can significantly affect the morale and productivity of the Center. Therefore, in this type of situation, it is the supervisor’s responsibility to insist that the parties involved put aside their personal feelings and behave in a professional, non-confrontational manner while on duty. If the parties are not able to do this, some form of disciplinary action may be required.

**By Candice Solie, APCO Institute Director**

## Quiz

### **CDE Article – Conflict Resolution**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Conflicts are a part of life in the workplace.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
2. The call-taker should never argue with a difficult caller.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. Conflicts between co-workers that can't be worked out should be taken to the supervisor.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. Emotions tend to increase the hostility of a conflict.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. "Warfare" between co-workers can have negative consequences for morale.
  - a. True
  - b. False