

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

### Communicating to resolve problems



#### BACKGROUND

Some of the least healthy relationships dental professionals have are with one another. All relationships are improved by open, honest communication, yet that type of communication can be lacking in professional dental relationships. As a result, conflict can develop rather than collaboration. This compromises production and creates an unhealthy environment. Tips for opening the lines of communication with colleagues were offered.

#### HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

##### Choose When and Where

Often privacy is an important ingredient in speaking with co-workers. In addition, communication should be timed to be optimal for all the parties involved. Choosing a time and location where it's possible to talk freely without interruption is key.

##### Consider Who to Speak to

It can feel therapeutic to unload on a co-worker when things aren't going well, but it can be a good way to lose the respect of that individual—and perhaps of the entire office. Rather than venting to someone you work with, it may be better to seek the advice of someone outside of the office, especially if your complaints involve other staff members. Blowing off steam or gossiping can also become chronic and promote a negative vibe to the office. Such speech is draining and creates unneeded stress.

##### Speak Directly

If a point of disagreement has arisen, it's important to speak directly to the person involved. Rather than amplify the effect by taking it to the office manager or dentist, issues should first be discussed directly with the individual. If the individual is new and doesn't follow procedures, it may be that he or she simply doesn't know the procedures yet. It's possible to begin a relationship with being helpful and mutually respectful by simply having a conversation that clears the air.

If you choose to escalate the situation and go to the office manager or dentist right off, it casts you in a negative light as a complainer or someone who doesn't give new people a chance. In addition, some managers or dentists prefer to give the new person time to settle in or simply struggle with addressing

performance issues. Directing your comments to them rather than the individual can create further stress for them.

Should a situation continue to be stressful or develop into a serious problem, it's time to involve the manager. If the problem is simply that the individual doesn't do things the way you like, it's important to remember that the goal is to perform in a way that's best for the practice and not to meet your standards.

##### Focus on Facts

Emotions can carry us away but we shouldn't base our communication with co-workers on these influences. Emotions tend to lead to more emotions and less resolution of problems. Sticking to the facts rather than an emotional response is more productive.

##### Avoid Being Passive Aggressive

Making snarky comments, engaging in the silent treatment, or choosing to be rude tends to backfire and doesn't get the results you desire. Directly addressing the individual involved helps both parties understand what the problem is without all the subterfuge and fosters clear communication. In addition, writing inappropriate notes or texts rather than simply talking to the individual can create a trail of evidence that can land you in trouble.

##### Think Before Acting

Once words are spoken, it's impossible to call them back. You may be able to backpedal a bit, but what was spoken can't be undone. When something happens, it's wise to take a beat to process how you feel and why you are being affected in that way. The event may be a trigger for something else in your own life and can lead to an automatic reaction. While we might feel justified in reacting, it's better to analyze what's going on and consider what the real issue is, so we can communicate honestly rather than overreacting and exacerbating the situation—which may not have been a problem at all.

##### Don't Be Defensive

Our first instinct when we hear something that doesn't convey a positive attitude toward ourselves is to become defensive. As team members, we need to evaluate what was said and whether it is justified. Is it true? Is this an area where we are struggling? Is further clarification needed to understand what has been said?

Responding in defensive or emotional ways does not resolve the situation and can make it worse. We need to control how we respond to what others say even if we are being criticized.

### Listen

Listening can open the lines of communication by helping you understand what others are thinking. In addition, if you want to have others listen to you, you should listen to them. Having a better understanding of what is being said and why can go a long way to promoting better understanding and conflict resolution.

It's also important to understand the difference between being aggressive and assertive. Aggressiveness puts the emphasis on attacking or confronting another person. Assertiveness indicates that you have confidence and are self-assured so that you can be forthright and stand up for yourself appropriately. Each person should be able to stand up for himself or herself in a way that conforms to proper behavior and uses proper channels. Challenges in communication that lead to conflict need to be faced confidently, using facts and not emotions, and rely on each individual's empowerment to self-advocate.

### Remain Confident

When speaking with a co-worker with whom you are in conflict, you should consider your tone of voice as well as its volume, your body language, and your ability to maintain eye contact. If you fail to maintain this control, a bully, among other personalities, can sense fear and will see that you lack confidence and can be manipulated. Your confidence should be based on having solid information to back your stance. It shouldn't be so overwhelming that you fail to listen to the other person and see his or her point

of view. When you approach conflict by trying to resolve things so all benefit, the best results can be achieved.

## WHEN COMMUNICATION FAILS

Some conflicts can't be resolved and may require us changing in our attitude or the situation itself. Some people refuse to respect co-workers and cannot handle conflict in a constructive way. When these types of things occur, it's important to be able to confidently protect your personal boundaries and end the conversation in a professional manner.

### Clinical Significance

Conflict can develop even in the most solid relationships. The key is how to address the situation and resolve it professionally and in a way that everyone can see benefits. It's important to say what you need to say and seek to agree on a resolution, to let it go, or to evaluate whether you are in the best work environment for you. Having tough conversations is easier if you have practice and keep your eyes on the goal of creating a work environment that is open, peaceful, and personally rewarding.

Whiteley J: Navigating conflict with communication. *RDH Mag* 39:32-35, 2019

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# CYBERSECURITY

## Safeguards against threats



### BACKGROUND

Although technology has provided great benefits to the practice of dentistry, new concerns and challenges are also associated with its use. A practice owner must be aware of the vulnerabilities of his or her information systems and consider the natural, environmental, and human threats that can compromise the reputation and finances of the dental practice. Being cybersecurity aware means to be cognizant of the criminal or unauthorized efforts to access the practice's servers, workstations, networks, programs, mobile devices, electronic devices, and stored data. The federal Cybersecurity Act of 2015 mandates the development of practical cybersecurity guidelines to help manage the risks facing the health care industry. Five cybersecurity threats have identified (Table). In addition, the Office

for Civil Rights (OCR), which enforces HIPAA, has offered several basic cybersecurity practices to reduce the impact of these threats.

### SAFEGUARDS

#### Encryption

Encryption converts electronic data into code that cannot be read without a decryption key. This prevents unauthorized users from viewing the data and can reduce the risk that patient data will be compromised. Dental practices can use encryption software or one of the e-mail service providers that encrypt messages. HIPAA-covered entities must determine if encryption is a reasonable and appropriate safeguard for protected health information that is stored or transmitted.