Conflict takes place for many reasons, but all conflict ultimately stems from an incompatibility of needs, motives, demands, or events.
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Conflict Defined

- **Conflict**
  - A condition that exists when two sets of demands, goals, or motives are incompatible
- **Negotiation**
  - The reaching of agreement through discussion and compromise

We are all called on daily to negotiate conflicts. An ability to negotiate and to resolve conflicts effectively has become a modern-day survival skill in our professional and personal settings. In today's workplace, most employers consider conflict resolution skills to be a key component of leadership.
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Conflicts – Good and Bad

• Positive
  – Think outside the box
  – Improve relationships
  – Prevent apathy

• Negative
  – Waste resources
  – Sabotage projects
  – Experience fatigue
  – Workplace violence

Conflict has both positive and negative consequences, much like work stress. On the positive side, the right amount of conflict can lead to creativity and may prevent a group mentality. On the negative side, intense conflict may lead to wasted resources, physical and mental illness, sabotage, fatigue, and violence.
Conflict is natural and it results from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs. It can also come from past rivalries. Combine all of these and you get a recipe for conflict.

Needs are essential to our well-being and conflicts arise when we ignore the needs of others, ourselves, or our groups.

Everyone perceives reality differently and people differ in their perceptions of the causes and consequences of problems.

Power conflicts occur when people try to make others change their actions or when they attempt to gain an unfair advantage over situations.

Values are the core of our being. Serious conflict occurs when people hold incompatible values or when people don’t understand the values of others.

Many people let their feelings and emotions influence how they deal in situations. Once emotions become involved, people will not allow facts to play a part in their decision-making.
Conflicts may arise when employees cannot get the resources that they need to do their jobs. Often when there are not enough resources, such as money, time, people, or equipment, there is an increase in the number of projects. That compounds the problem resulting in fatigue and wasted resources.
Differences in age or generation can lead to conflict because the members of one generation may not accept the values of another generation. Baby boomers see Gen-Xers as disrespectful of rules, disloyal to employers, and not willing to pay their dues. Gen-Xers see Boomers as worshiping hierarchy and not willing to change. Generation Y has just entered the workforce and will comprise the bulk of workers by 2010.
In her book, Muriel Solomon, describes nine difficult personality types that you are likely to encounter in the workforce.

Tyrants treat you in a high-handed and harsh manner.

Bullies are cruel and will use threats to get their way.

Sadists take pleasure in causing you difficulty.

Time bombs hold in their anger and then unexpectedly explode into tantrums.

Tacklers will attack you personally just make a point on an issue.

Intimidators gain support by hurting or embarrassing you.

Hotheads will start arguments among your coworkers.

Revengers resent you and will work to undermine your efforts.

Snipers attack you using rumors and innuendo, often disguising the jab as a joke.

Difficult people can be anyone – even you!
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Conflict may surface as people work in teams whose members vary by ethnicity, religion, and gender. Differing educational background and work specialties may also lead to conflict.
Balancing the demands of work and family life is a major challenge facing workers at all levels. Work-family conflict occurs when the individual has too many roles to perform: employee, spouse or partner, parent, committee member. This can lead to depression and fatigue. Some individuals even have to choose between having a career and having a family.
Sexual harassment is generally defined as unwanted sexually-oriented behavior in the workplace that results in discomfort or interference with the job. Sexual harassment creates conflict because the harassed person has to make a choice between two incompatible motives. In addition, conflict is often created among third-party observers as they take sides, experience jealousy, or feel helpless.

Aside from being an illegal and immoral act, sexual harassment has negative effects such as job stress, lowered morale, severe conflict, and lowered productivity.
If you are having to deal with other people, sooner or later, you will have to deal with a conflict and work to resolve that conflict. Regardless of the type of conflict you are dealing with, there are several techniques that you should follow whenever you are trying to bring harmony to a volatile situation.
The most highly-recommended way of resolving conflict is confrontation and problem-solving. In this process, the person identifies the true source of conflict and resolves it systematically using a problem-solving approach. One approach is the Collaboration method. In this method, each side lists their grievances. The lists are then exchanged. Compromise is used to reach mutually satisfying outcomes.
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Disarm the Opposition

- Agree with criticism
- Face the allegations
- Talk to the other party

Another method for conflict resolution is to disarm the opposition by agreeing with his/her criticism of you. You may also face the party or parties who are harming you. Talking about the problem will lead to resolution. It is important in this method to not counterattack, but to listen. Disarming generally works better than counterattacking your opponent.
Cognitive Restructuring is about turning problems into possibilities. According to the technique of Cognitive Restructuring, you mentally convert negative aspects into positive ones by looking for positive elements in a situation. This allows for fewer areas of dispute.
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Appeal to Third-Party Mediation

• Willing to resolve
• Willing to be objective
• Willing to compromise

If you cannot resolve the problem yourself, make an appeal to a higher-level official or authority. Virtually all employers have some sort of appeal or mediation process. If you opt for this process, you must be willing to truly resolve the conflict, be objective to the other’s point of view, and be willing to compromise. Remember, things may not go your way.
The formal process of filing a complaint and resolving a dispute is the Grievance Procedure. It can also be regarded as a third-party method of resolving conflict. The steps in the process may vary from employer to employer. Only about 1% of all grievances will go to arbitration. Most problems are solved at the manager or executive level.
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Negotiating and Bargaining

• Create a positive climate
• Allow for compromise and face-saving
• Focus on interests
• Make a final offer
• Role-play

To become a good conflict manager requires a lot of practice. Just remember that the goal is to reach a compromise that both of you can live with. Find a way that both of you can walk away feeling like a winner.
Handling Conflict and Being Assertive

Assertiveness Defined

• Assertiveness
  – A willingness to be forceful if a situation requires it

Several of the techniques for resolving conflict require assertiveness. Learning to express your feelings and making your demands known are an important aspect of becoming an effective individual.
Assertive people have a talent for clearly stating what it is that they want. They are also able to let others know how they feel without being abusive, abrasive, or obnoxious.

Non-assertive people let things happen to them without voicing their feelings, wants, or needs. This leads to resentment and anger.

Aggressive people are obnoxious and overbearing. They will try to get what they want without regard for others’ feelings. These people tend to be abusive and abrasive.
A person can take a number of every day interactions to overcome shyness and lack of assertiveness. They can also use everyday interactions to become less aggressive.

1) Set a goal to establish in your own mind how you want to behave. Write down the goal.

2) Smile, lean forward, uncross your arms and make eye contact.

3) Telephoning people and organizations is a good opportunity to practice appropriate people skills. Try volunteering at a local organization.

4) Talking to people you don’t know is sometimes less anxiety-provoking than talking to people you know. If having a conversation is too much, then just smile and say, “Hi” to every person you pass for a week or so. Then try having conversations.

5) Make more decisions. Start out with simple decisions, such as choosing a place to dine for lunch with your co-workers. Don’t worry if everyone is happy with your decision, you can’t please everyone.