A Quick Guide to Conflict

Knowing When to Get Involved

When a member of your team or department is involved in a conflict at work, your role as a supervisor is to provide feedback and coaching to help them develop and use effective conflict management skills. In many cases, you may not be directly involved, but your support will be important in helping the person manage the situation effectively.

Get involved when

✓ The conflict is interrupting you or your team’s work.
✓ The conflict is disruptive and counterproductive.
✓ One of more of your direct report’s behavior is inconsistent with expectations for HOW they are to get their work done*.

Your role is to:

• Ensure that others feel valued and respected regardless of their background.
• Coach others to find a productive way forward.
• Create and strengthen meaningful collaboration and teamwork.

⚠ The culture on your team will reflect the behaviors that are tolerated. Difficult and problematic behavior that is not addressed will set the tone and affect others. As a supervisor, it is your role to address such behavior through setting clear expectations for what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Addressing unacceptable behavior is an important part of managing performance.

*Go to z.umn.edu/rvecagoals to learn more about the competency model developed at the University of Minnesota to support talent development discussions.
What are the next steps?

**PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND COACHING***

- Ensure that others receive timely, actionable, and constructive feedback and coaching so they are aware of the impact they have on others.

- Help others respond to unexpected problems with flexibility and resourcefulness so they can approach the conflict in a productive way.

- Be specific about behaviors and explain why a behavior was effective or ineffective, and help the person understand the situation, their behavior, and the impact of their behavior.

  “Sara, when we were discussing Alex’s proposal in the meeting this morning and you kept interrupting him, it really shut down the conversation and I think Alex is pretty frustrated.”

**EFFECTIVELY MANAGE PERFORMANCE***

- Provide clear performance expectations, including expectations for HOW they work with others to achieve results. For example, behaviors such as the ability to “maintain productive relationships with others even when faced with conflict” or to “listen respectfully and openly to others regardless of level, position, or background” describe important performance expectations.

- Address performance problems right away. This includes behaviors and expectations related to how the work gets done. You can accomplish this through check-ins. Check-ins are regular discussions that happen throughout the year to:
  - Check in on progress toward goals,
  - Stay aligned on current projects,
  - Discuss what is going well and what could be better, and
  - Agree on next steps.

- Ongoing check-ins are the key to on-the-job learning, which is the single most important way people improve and grow at work.

*See the Feedback and Coaching and the Managing Performance modules for information on steps, tools and techniques.