

## Dealing with Conflict

### DO PEOPLE RESPOND DIFFERENTLY TO CONFLICT?

Yes, absolutely although generally speaking most of us are not great at dealing with conflict and would rather avoid it, if possible. This can mean that we let things go too quickly or put our own needs or expectations on the back burner, to avoid having uncomfortable conversations.

### IS THERE ONE 'BEST WAY' TO HANDLE CONFLICT?

Not really - the way we deal with the situation depends on the type of conflict that we're experiencing - there's no one 'right way'. For example, how we might deal with conflict with a coworker is likely to be quite different to how we handle conflict with an aggressive customer - which is completely appropriate.

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT OPTIONS THAT WE HAVE WHEN WE WANT TO RESOLVE CONFLICT?

Using the Thomas Kilmann framework as a guide, there are five different options for conflict resolution and we generally do have a natural style or preference for responding to conflict.

**1) Competing** - where an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense. This is generally quite assertive and can also be uncooperative. This can be the most appropriate style when you require a customer to demonstrate

proof of vaccination - your need to see the certificate outweighs their reluctance to provide it.

**2) Accommodating** (or smoothing) - which is the opposite of competing, where someone neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person - an element of self-sacrifice. This can be the most appropriate approach if you and a team member have a different perspective on something - you may choose to let your colleague 'win' if you don't feel strongly but they are quite passionate about the issue.

**3) Compromising** - with the objective to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. It can create a win/win but it's also risky as can lead to a loss on both sides. This may be the most appropriate style when negotiating shift changes to the roster. The team member and manager may reach a compromise which enables both parties to be satisfied, even if they don't get exactly what they wanted.

**4) Avoiding** - which is unassertive and uncooperative. People who prefer this style generally do not address the conflict and may postpone an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. This may be the most appropriate response when you have an aggressive customer - engaging management or SAPOL and removing yourself from the situation.

### 5) Collaborating or problem solving

- where both parties work together to find a solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. This may be an appropriate style if you have a customer that has certain dietary requirements - you may not be able to meet the initial request for their order, but you can reach a solution that suits both parties.

### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

*These questions are designed to prompt team discussion and interaction following the podcast:*

- What is our natural way of responding to conflict?
- Could we trial different approaches at times to get a better outcome?
- How do we handle conflict with a customer, compared with conflict within our team?

### Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

