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Resolve Ongoing Conflict To Reduce Your Stress



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How to resolve conflict ICLIPART

By Dianna Booher—

“Sometimes I get the feeling that the whole world is against me, but deep down I know that’s not true. Some of the smaller countries are neutral.” I love that comment by humorist Robert Orben.

From the smallest incident or conversation, sometimes conflict balloons to the ridiculous. Like my bathtub battle. Our bathtub had a crack in it. And the job was too small to be profitable for several marble companies we called about repair. Finally, we found someone willing to take on the job—the company bidding on the marble work in our new home under construction.

They sent someone to see the crack, gave us a bid of \$150, and sent a repair person (Tim) out to do the repair. But he didn't bring the right tools to complete the job. So leaving the tub in a pasted mess, he made an appointment a few days later to finish the project.

On the return day, I came home from work and waited. Tim didn't show. When I called Tim, he had no explanation for the no-show, but rescheduled. I came home from work the third time to meet him. Once again, Tim failed to show up.

Quite upset, I called the supervisor. She apologized and rescheduled, promising that Tim would show up the next day at twelve noon *sharp*.

For the third time, Tim is a no-show. I call the supervisor again:

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“It's 12:15; I'm home. Tim hasn't shown up.”

“The appointment was supposed to be tomorrow,” the rep said.

“No, it was scheduled for today. I’m flying out of town tomorrow so I was very careful to schedule for today, not Thursday. And besides that, Tim has stood me up three times previously! The first time he didn’t bring the right tools with him. The next two times, he didn’t show up at all.”

“Well, that’s your problem.”

“What? Tim isn’t your employee?”

“Tim should have called in and asked the dispatcher to schedule him rather than trying to schedule on his own.”

“But evidently he didn’t call you. And that’s not my problem. That’s an internal problem.”

“Look, we’re doing this job as a *favor* to you.”

“A *favor*? You’re charging me \$150 for the repair.”

“We’re not making a profit on this—it’s a *favor*.”

“You may not be making a huge profit on this repair—but you *are* handling a very profitable job as a subcontractor on my new house under construction.”

“Don’t threaten me! We marble people work for the builder—not you homeowners.”

“I’m not threatening you—I’m telling you that I want the tub job finished, so—”

The store owner cut me off: “Look, I don’t have time to stay on the phone with you. A) You want us to be out there tomorrow at noon to finish the tub. B) You don’t want us out there tomorrow at noon. C) We don’t need your business. Which will it be?”

As you can imagine, I was quite stunned at this juncture in the conversation. I had a tub repair half completed and had been unable to get anyone else interested in the project. Plus, I had a major marble project half complete on the new house—one that would cost me even more to begin new with another subcontractor. As they saying goes, this company had me “over a \$6,000 marble barrel.”

Unfortunately, I stewed for days about letting that marble company finish the new construction project—or paying a premium to switch vendors in mid-stream. The inner turmoil came from feeling that I didn’t have choices, or that both choices were poor ones.

Eventually, in later years, I learned a little more about handling conflict: Actually, we always have choices—four, in fact. We simply have to choose the most expedient option for any particular situation. We can

- accommodate (give in to the other person)
- compromise (give up some of our goals or wants)
- overpower (insist on our way, even if angering the other person or breaking the relationship altogether)
- collaborate to resolve the issue (develop new alternatives so that both of us still reach our goals and feel good about the situation)

What creates emotional chaos is feeling that we have no choice in a matter. For example, if we give in, we may feel “taken advantage of.” If we overpower, we may feel guilty or regret losing the relationship. If we compromise, we stew over not getting the result we want or need.

Ongoing conflict caused by always feeling like a victim wears us down emotionally as well as drains our physical energy. If you have one particular person who constantly makes you feel drained, consider your four choices to

handle the situation. Choose the best reaction (accommodate, compromise, overpower, or collaborate). Then let go of the situation.

The anger or stress evolves from failure to recognize that you have a choice in the matter. So if “giving in” proves to be the easiest or less painful way to settle a conflict, keep reminding yourself that you did *choose* that option.

If you still can't shed the negative feeling brought on by the conflict, figure out a way to minimize contact with the difficult person. Consider this advice from Max Gunther: “If you're losing a tug-of-war with a tiger, give him the rope before he gets to your arm. You can always buy a new rope.” In other words, *choose* to get on with your goal or life!

Ongoing conflict is like a simmering pot of water—ready to boil over at the slightest provocation. In a bubbling state, you'll never experience inner calm and peace. And undoubtedly, sooner or later, your career will suffer.

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books, including [Communicate Like a Leader](#). She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at [BooherResearch.com](#) and [@DiannaBooher](#).

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