

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE GUIDELINES

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ACHIEVE uses this resource internally as a guide for resolving conflict and maintaining a respectful workplace. We encourage you to consider elements of these guidelines as you review or create your own.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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We believe that conflict is unavoidable. It is inherent within all organizations and groups. How we handle conflict determines whether it is destructive or constructive. Conflict is not the same as disrespect, although people may behave disrespectfully while in conflict. There are many sources of conflict, including disagreements, personality clashes, and differences of opinion. Constructive conflict resolution becomes easier when we share a high level of trust, believe the best about each other, and commit to listening to each other. We work to resolve our conflicts constructively because that creates a relational environment in which we can reach our goals as an organization.

## RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

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We believe that disrespect is any type of behavior that causes offense to someone else. This includes behavior like putting others down, verbal abuse, avoiding, ignoring, excluding, or bullying others, and using negative body language. Respect, on the other hand, is when people treat each other with consideration and empathy. Respect encompasses more than just showing restraint and putting up with certain people or behaviors. When people respect each other, they safeguard the dignity of their coworkers. Respect also entails welcoming differences and recognizing that they contribute to a vibrant workplace.

## FOCUS ON IMPACT

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When it comes to issues of respect and conflict, it is the impact of our actions that matter, not our intentions. An individual may have no intent to be disrespectful, but if he or she is perceived as disrespectful, then the behavior is disrespectful. If our intent was not malicious but the effect was negative, we must acknowledge, apologize for, and change our behavior, even when we meant no harm.

### APPROACHING DISRESPECT & CONFLICT

When tensions around disrespect or conflict arise in the workplace, let the following principles guide you.

#### Before doing anything, remember:

1. Most people do not act with poor intentions, so when you are feeling badly about something someone has done or said, assume that they probably did not mean to hurt you.
  2. Most people want to be approached directly when someone else has a concern about something they have done or said.
  3. Email and social media are very poor ways to address disrespect and conflict. They typically only escalate the situation. Address issues in person, or if that is not possible, over the phone.
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#### Starting a conversation:

1. Most people prefer to be asked about their actions first rather than being told that their actions did not work. So start with a question about what was behind a certain action. For example, say, "I'm curious about what you meant when you said . . ."
  2. Listen – try to understand.
  3. If necessary, share how a person's actions affected you, as well as what you would prefer that person to have said or done.
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#### Always remember:

1. Ask if there would be a better time to talk.
2. Suggest bringing in another person to help the conversation (a peer or manager).
3. Approach your team leader for confidential coaching on how to handle the situation. Note that a manager will not generally convey a message on your behalf. Instead, they will help you figure out what to say or do, or they will hold a joint meeting to help everyone talk.