



You can rely on one thing no matter where you work: conflict is inevitable, whether it is with a co-worker, your supervisor, a vendor, or a customer. While you can't avoid conflict, you can learn how to identify your personal conflict styles and make better decisions in the heat of the moment. This month we sat down with Sharon Webber, Manager of Community-Based Initiatives at the Center for Resolution and Justice (CRJ), to discuss five different conflict management styles.

1. Avoiders: You avoid the issue. You don't assert what you want, but you don't help the other person get their needs met either.

When it can work: when the issue is trivial, when you need some space, or when your relationship with the other party is more important to you than the issue.

CRJ tip: "Just because someone is avoiding the issue, doesn't mean they don't care. Some people find it uncomfortable to verbally engage or physically stay in a conflict. If you can, give them some time and space for their response."

2. Accommodators: You cooperate to a high-degree, and it may be at your own expense.

When it can work: when you are confident that the other person is an expert, or you want to preserve a relationship more than your goal.

CRJ tip: "Remember that you have needs! Don't be so agreeable that you sacrifice your needs in the process."

3. Competitors: You are assertive and do not seek cooperation with others—a "win-lose" model.



When it can work: when quick, decisive action is needed, when precedent needs to be set, or when people are aware of and support your approach.

CRJ tip: "Competitors are assertive but can sometimes be perceived as aggressive. If competing is indeed the best strategy, pursue it but be mindful of how others are reacting to you."

4. Collaborators: When you partner or pair up with the other party to achieve both your goals—a "win-win" model.



When it can work: when the issue is complex and could use multiple perspectives, and when everyone has the time, energy and trust in each other to pursue a consensus. Collaboration often leads to high quality decisions and improved or preserved relationships.

CRJ tip: "It's so important that when you collaborate, you listen to each other and truly hear what each other is saying. If you do, it will be much easier to find the common ground that will be the basis for moving forward."

5. Compromisers: you come to a compromise with the other party, where neither party gets exactly what they want.



When it can work: when there are equally important goals for both sides, or when a temporary fix is adequate.

CRJ tip: "Compromise can sometime seem like the easiest way to solve conflict, but don't over-rely on it. Collaboration can be far more effective in building shared goals and outcomes."

The Takeaway: According to Thomas, K.W., and R.H. Kilmann, most of us habitually use only one or two strategies that we are most comfortable with. Remember that your go-to strategy may not be the best one to use for a particular situation. Getting familiar with each style will allow you to move between and among them as appropriate.

"It's important to recognize your natural style for dealing with conflict," Webber recommends, "but don't forget that your style may shift based on circumstances or dynamics. Accept where you are, and make sure to accept where others are, as well."

CRJ's conflict resolution services are offered at low or no cost for EAP employees and their family members.