

# WORKSHOP 1 LOOKING AT BOTH SIDES

## GOALS

- ▶ Understand the role of perception in conflict.
- ▶ Discover and utilize strategies for understanding someone else's point of view.



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## WALKING IN YOUR COWORKERS' SHOES

It's probably impossible to truly "walk in someone else's shoes"—to know, understand, and feel what another person has experienced. No one can completely understand what it is like, for example, to be a member of a different ethnic group—the unfairness suffered, or the special sense of community. Though we can't really walk in someone else's shoes, respecting and considering the perspectives that might lie behind another person's words and actions is essential for avoiding misunderstandings. Seeing both sides of a conflict is the only way to reach acceptable solutions. This workshop demonstrates how perspective influences conflicts and conflict resolution—in the workplace, and in life.

### Resolving Problems and Conflicts Resources

Video (31:00)

CD-ROM Study Guide

Instructor's Resource CD-ROM

WebTutor

ExamView Pro Testing CD-ROM

### Who's at Fault?

Answers will vary. Most learners will agree that Michael aggravated Orlando (even though it was unintentional) and, therefore, doesn't have the right to be angry with him.

### Who's at Fault?

**Michael:** Someday I'm going to have it out with Orlando in the mail room!

**Sasha:** Orlando? Why?

**Michael:** Last Friday at 4:30 I dropped a stack of outgoing mail from my department on the counter. All I said was, 'Have a nice weekend,' and he snarled at me.

**Sasha:** Mike, he probably thought you were being sarcastic. You dumped a load of work on him at the end of the day and then wished him a nice weekend—it sounds like a bad joke.



**Was Michael justified in being angry with Orlando?**

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

## Seeing the Other Side

In conflict, emotions run high. The words and actions of others can seem doubly misguided and even hurtful when we are trying to express something we want or believe in. When involved in misunderstandings and conflicts, it is important to remember that the other person is not trying to hinder your objectives, but is expressing his or her wants and beliefs, just like you. The following tips will help you to see both sides of any conflict.

- **Respect different worldviews.** Remember that everyone has a unique worldview based upon diverse life experiences. Listen in a way that acknowledges how the other person developed his or her worldview.
- **Let go of being “right.”** Putting your opinions, beliefs, and values at risk is the scariest part of conflict. When you stop trying to convince the other person of your “rightness,” your convictions are no longer “on the line”—freeing you to establish a common understanding.
- **Show empathy.** It is difficult to understand what anyone else is saying when your defenses are up. Instead of placing or accepting blame, listen empathetically—express care, understanding, and concern for the other person’s position.
- **Don’t react to communication styles.** Like perspectives, communication styles come in many shapes and sizes. Keep an open mind about unfamiliar communication styles, and understand that one style is not necessarily better than another. Ignore biting comments and tone of voice, and focus on the essence and content of the message.
- **Don’t assume that you know what the other party wants.** A large percentage of misunderstandings stem from incorrect assumptions about the other party’s goals and wishes.

## Key Ideas

- ★ **perspective**—a particular evaluation of a situation or facts, especially from one person’s point of view
- ★ **belief**—a conviction that certain things are true or real; confidence; faith; trust; an opinion
- ★ **worldview**—a personal interpretation or image of the universe and humanity; view of life
- ★ **empathy**—the ability to identify with and understand another person’s feelings or difficulties

*Sometimes I think that the main obstacle to empathy is our persistent belief that everybody is exactly like us.*

—John Powell,  
geologist and ethnologist

## Tools of the Trade

This workshop deals with the role of perspective in conflict and offers suggestions for understanding the perspectives of others. Review Key Ideas, definitions, and the guidelines presented in Tools of the Trade.

## Introduction to Conflict in the Workplace

View and discuss Segment 1: *Introduction to Conflict in the Workplace*. Running time: approx. 4:00.



# INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

## Segment 1

This video segment focuses on the value of seeing the other side's perspective when resolving conflicts in the workplace.

Experts on conflict resolution will talk about the finer points of listening, negotiation, and peacemaking. Examples of conflicts on the job will convey the importance of reaching win-win solutions. As you watch the video, think about the role that listening plays in avoiding and resolving workplace conflicts.

*Respecting and considering your coworkers' perspectives is essential for avoiding conflict.*



### Post-Viewing Questions

1. Effective listening helps you to ascertain the needs of opposing parties and to find common ground from which a solution can be derived.
2. Understanding opposing points of view facilitates negotiations and enables win-win outcomes.
3. In a win-lose situation, one party leaves feeling resentment and/or defeat. This damages the relationship and the long-term implementation of the agreement.

### Post-Viewing Questions

1. Why is listening important for resolving conflicts?

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2. How can understanding an opposing point of view help resolve conflicts?

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3. What is wrong with a win-lose resolution?

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# ON THE JOB

## Tough Times

*Tim nervously glances out the window as the last employee takes a seat in his office. He clears his throat and begins.*

**Tim:** You may have heard some rumors in the last week or so. Let me reassure you that there are no planned layoffs. However, because the company is going through tough times right now, we do need to increase our sales by 15 percent in the next three months.

**Vera:** But how can we do that? We're already putting in extra time just to maintain last year's sales level. What are you doing? How about putting in extra hours or getting out there on the sales floor?

**Tim:** Excuse me? I've been working night and day in meetings with the other managers to figure out how we can get through this without asking more of you, and this is the thanks I get?

**Aiesha:** Why should we thank you when we have to work twice as hard? We're doing our part.

**Tim:** Are you really trying hard enough? When I was on the sales floor, we cleared 300 units minimum each month—with fewer staff. We did it, and so can you, if you pick up the pace.

**Vera:** Things have changed since you were in sales. If you spent any time out there, you'd know there are fewer customers, and they're buying less. Give us some credit, will you?

**Tim:** Oh, come on, things haven't changed that much. You just need to get in there and sell more, that's all. *(Tim glances at his watch and continues.)* We can talk about this later. Think about what I said—and get to work!



What is the problem? How does Tim see the problem? What might be influencing his point of view? How do his employees see the problem? What might be influencing their outlook? What would you suggest Tim and his employees do to help ease the problem?

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*I never take  
my own side in  
a quarrel.*

—Robert Frost,  
poet

## On the Job Tough Times

Answers will vary but should contain some of the following: The company is having revenue concerns and needs to increase sales. On top of that, the management and sales staff are viewing the problem from different perspectives, do not trust or understand each other, and are not trying to understand each other.

Tim thinks the sales staff isn't selling effectively. He used to do floor sales, and he sold more units, so he believes the problem is his staff.


The staff members believe they're working as hard as they can. They think the problem is that there are fewer customers than in the past. Tim doesn't do floor sales any more, so they don't think he understands today's sales climate.

Tim and his staff should hear each other out without judging and try to reach an agreement about a course of action. They should each give the other party the benefit of the doubt. They should also show empathy for the difficulty of the other's job and try to work together on a solution.

## PRACTICE

### Practice

1. Give learners the option of doing this exercise in writing, as a cartoon storyboard, or some other medium they want to work in.
2. You may wish to substitute other scenarios more relevant to your learners' experience.
3. This exercise might be more productive for some learners if they work in pairs. Good sources for opinions are *The Wall Street Journal's* Opinion Journal Editorial Page and Reader Response Page. These can be found online at <http://opinionjournal.com/> and <http://opinionjournal.com/responses/>.
4. Encourage learners to discuss their findings. Help them see that sensitivity to customers, patients, and coworkers is essential in every career.

1. Describe a conflict you've seen recently in a movie or television show from two different characters' points of view. Discuss how the resolution of the story would affect each character's perspective.
2. Divide into small groups and choose one of the topics below. Design short skits demonstrating miscommunication due to perception differences, and good communication that includes each side's point of view. Perform the skits for the class, and have the class evaluate the characters' conflict resolution skills.
  - Returning a damaged jacket to a store
  - Being late for work
  - Finding a location for the annual company party
3.  Read two opinion columns from a newspaper or Internet news source that discuss opposing sides of the same issue. Analyze each column to uncover the personal beliefs and convictions that have influenced each writer's argument.
4. Becoming sensitive to individual differences and learning to understand others' viewpoints is important in many different career fields. To sell a product, for example, you have to know what your customers need and want. On a separate piece of paper, briefly describe how this sensitivity could be useful in your desired career field.

## SUMMARY

- When involved in misunderstandings and conflicts, it is important to remember that the other person is not trying to hinder your objectives, but is expressing his or her wants and beliefs, just like you.
- Trying to see both sides of a conflict is the only way to reach acceptable compromises and solutions.

*Understanding is a two-way street.*

—Eleanor Roosevelt

# REVIEW QUESTIONS



1. What does “walking in someone else’s shoes” mean?

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2. Name and describe a good strategy for understanding another person’s point of view.

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## Review Questions

1. “Walking in someone else’s shoes” means to truly know, understand, and feel what another person has experienced.
2. Answers may vary, but may include some version of the following: Respect different worldviews; let go of being “right;” be empathetic; don’t react to different communication styles; don’t assume you know what the other party wants.

# PROJECTS

1. Identify a friend or family member and record your perception of their responsibilities and roles in life. Arrange a time when you can “change places” with them and “walk in their shoes.” Record your activities and your feelings after the exchange. Include any changes in your perceptions of their role.
2. Think about the most irritating person you know, someone who disagrees with you on almost every issue. Suppose you wake up one morning and discover that you have become that person. What would be important to you? What would your major concerns be? What would the “new you” say about the person you were yesterday? Describe how the world appears to you from your new point of view.
3. As any actor can tell you, learning to “walk in someone else’s shoes” isn’t always easy. Actors must learn to feel, think, and speak like their characters. How do actors learn to do this? Talk with a drama instructor in your school, or with someone who performs with a theater group in your community. Adapt what you learn about acting to understanding someone else’s perspective. Summarize what you learn in a brief instruction sheet for your class.
4. View three television programs that feature stories about workplaces. List all of the office conflicts that arise from perception differences. Describe how resolutions were attained in each circumstance.

## Projects

1. If this is not practical, allow learners to interview their subjects to gain insights about their daily lives.
2. Give learners the option of completing this project in another medium—as a poem, a script, or even an art project. This project will require an honest attempt at showing empathy and could be sensitive in nature.
3. A good alternative is to have an actor speak to the class. Have learners prepare questions before the actor’s visit.
4. Encourage learners to consider a variety of television workplaces, including hospitals, doctor’s offices, restaurants, business offices, retail stores, police stations, law offices, government offices, and courtrooms.