

How to manage conflict in the workplace

Businesses must minimise exposure to conflict, both from within the company and from outside, if they want to maximise success. Dealing with issues quickly and effectively is vital. Focus on these 10 areas for better mediation . . .

1. Management. Do any of your directors or managers have a combative style that interferes with measured conflict management? This is a crucial area if you want to reduce strife at its source.

2. Relationships. Consider how your key relationships work - those involving staff, board members, shareholders, customers, business partners and other stakeholders. Are the people involved looked upon as human beings with legitimate needs? Are they regularly engaged and communicated with in a meaningful way? Poor handling can result in simmering discontent.

3. Procedures and resources. Are clear agreements, contracts and procedures in place? Do systems and equipment support or hinder your efforts? Lack of clarity and poor resourcing can lead to trouble.

4. Old remedies. Disciplinary procedures and tribunals are often deployed to tackle issues with the aim of "winning". They have their place, yet these processes can take a long time to conclude; soak up too much management time; create high anxiety; cost a lot of money; and destroy relationships along the way. Even a victory can prove hollow. This is not ideal, so mediation often proves an attractive option.

5. Better procedures. An impartial mediator can tailor procedures without breaking rules. Mediation is flexible, confidential, consensual and focused on the future, so the parties involved are allowed to have their say in a safe environment. Consider a wide range of settlement options, decide possible outcomes and assess how they can be enforced.

6. Cost benefits. The speed of mediation enables the costs in resolving issues to be "significantly lower" than traditional remedies, said a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development survey in March. The government wants more

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mediation in civil, family and employment cases to save money for those involved.

7. Help for managers. Mediation can reduce sickness absence, staff turnover, loss of key staff, and lost management time. It can also help to protect reputation, retain customers and boost productivity.

8. Improving the culture. The key people benefits of mediation include: easing the burden of formal procedures; improving relationships; and helping morale, creativity and productivity as part of a strong people management culture.

9. Mediation on steroids. A blended service, involving mediation, executive coaching and enablement, together with organisational stress management techniques, is a powerful way to cope with conflict. It's especially useful for teams and boards, or when changing company culture.

10. Want to cash in? Mediation is growing in popularity. It's good value, speedy and effective, with a success rate of between 80 and 90 per cent, and can be applied to a wide range of business and personal contexts. Take a moment to think how your organisation could benefit.

(The above short article appeared in the May 2011 "Director" magazine of the Institute of Directors.)

Businesses and the government are increasingly realising that mediation can minimise their exposure to conflict in the workplace. Do you think that you, too, could benefit significantly from these tips? Let us know if you would like some help, from independent experts, to review and support your business in developing a tailored response to this emerging agenda.

Author

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About the Author

Julian Evans

Julian is a Mediator with extensive experience of dealing with legal and people disputes, as well as a Facilitator and Executive Coach with experience to the level of Master Coach.

Julian was acknowledged by Europe's largest independent mediation body (Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution - CEDR) to have undertaken one of the Top 10 most significant mediations between 1990 and 2010. This case was then peer-voted by fellow mediators to be second among the 10 for progressiveness and innovation.

Professional information: Triple accredited mediator, CBT qualified coach, MCI Arb, CM-IMI, MAC.

About A2Z

A2Z is a consortium of over 100 experienced business experts. Julian is a member of the A2Z HR Team.

A2Z adds real value to businesses by combining diverse expertise to deliver a bespoke solution to solve a business critical issue.

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