



Cool Words for Key Moments

Blossie's Booknips
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@work!

Blossie's Booknips

From Diana Davin and [Blossie's Books](#)

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Cool Words for Key Moments

...at work!

On a warm, sunny morning, you get ready to start work, listening to some music and thinking about the day ahead. Feeling focused and positive, you get to your desk and settle in, take a sip of your coffee, and start planning the day.

Then the phone rings, a text pings, or you open your email, and suddenly things take a turn. Someone emailed your boss (instead of you) to say he doesn't like the layout you already approved for the company's home page. Or an angry customer has gone all the way to your District Manager to say you were rude to her. Maybe a sale you were sure was a slam dunk stalled overnight. A joke you told was taken out of context and an important colleague isn't amused.

It's only 9:30, but your work day, which was wide open and full of possibilities just a few minutes ago, has narrowed to a pinpoint: damage control. Maybe you have immediate emotional and physical reactions: nervousness, fast heart rate, sweaty hands. For the moment at least, conflict has sapped your strength and stolen your peace.

Does this have to be just a typical work day? (No.) Can you control the number of conflicts you have to face? (Yes.) How about the way you react to them? (Definitely.)

Flipping out

We use dramatic words to describe conflict, phrases like "boiling over," "flipping out," and "exploding." A conflict can feel like facing a monster. "Which side are you on?" demands the beast, grabbing us by the shoulders and shaking hard.

"Whose story do you believe?"

"Who are your real friends?"

"Shouldn't you be watching your back?"

“Didn’t Josh actually owe you a favor?”

From minor misunderstandings to major blowups, conflicts at work can spread fast and sweep wide, pulling in everyone in their path and making it impossible to think about anything else. And relationships? Forget them. Regardless of how great they once were or one day might be, conflicts can end them.

And it’s just reality: the question isn’t *if* you’ll face conflicts at work, but *when*. Any time you’re dealing with people who are different from you, people who have different experiences and hopes and interests and ways of communicating (that would be everybody, every day!), there will be clashes.

Of all the people-skills we need at work (and let’s face it, in life), conflict management may be the toughest. Denial doesn’t work. Neither does running away or pretending a conflict isn’t serious when it is. Plus, losing it at work: *not an option*. A habit of losing your cool will take you off the A-list faster than just about anything else.

Whether you’ve been knocked down by conflict in the past or you’re looking for solutions to the hot situations you’re facing today, you don’t need to run from conflict at work, ignore it, or beat it back with a stick.

Beautiful someone, you’ve got better choices!

From here to harmony

By the time you read the last page of this ebook, you’ll have some great tools for handling hot situations at work (and maybe even in life!) in ways that can save your sanity, build your reputation, and even improve your relationships and network.

Learn how to keep an already hot situation from spinning out of control. Be polite but powerful, strong but flexible, and able to safeguard your best relationships without making yourself into a doormat.

An ounce of prevention



"I" not "you"

A simple change can help prevent conflict

"You" and "your" are two short words that are long on power! When they're being used in a conflict, "you" and "your" can feel like a finger poke in the chest:

- "You can't expect me to do that for you!"
- "I can't take responsibility for your mistake!"
- "You can't possibly be asking me to help you out again!"

Result: the person feels on the spot and defensive, and the relationship is damaged instead of helped by a strong boundary enforced with confidence and respect.

A better choice: "I" statements take the edge off difficult messages and keep hostility under control: "I'm upset that we're going to miss the deadline" is much easier to hear than, "You should have tried harder to meet the deadline" (even if that's true, it doesn't help the mood, and a defensive person isn't going to work well with you in the future). The "I" statement keeps the listener from feeling attacked and ready to mount a counterattack. "I" statements also say you're responsible for your own feelings and make the person you're talking to more willing to listen.

In the same way, "You don't understand what I'm saying" is a lot harder to hear than, "I want to make sure my point is clear" which leaves the other person room to offer their own opinion as part of a dialogue.

So watch those "you" statements and make the shift to "I" whenever you can.

When you do...

"You did the wrong thing."

becomes

"I don't think that was the best way to handle the situation."

"You're wrong."

becomes

"I don't agree."

"What you're asking for doesn't make any sense."

becomes

"I don't understand. I've got some questions."

"That's your problem."

becomes

"I'm not able to help with that."

Read the new statements, and just feel the controlled, sophisticated, and professional vibe in the air. A few small wording changes help prevent conflict and make a huge difference.



“Not going there”

Know your nonnegotiables!

While the lines at work are clearer than in personal life, topics *non grata* can still crop up, causing tension and strife. Knowing what these topics are for you and shutting them down fast will help prevent conflict before it can happen.

First, for *everyone*: religion and politics. These tend to be the issues people have strong views about that are not going to change, making them inappropriate work conversation. Steer clear of them.

Second, your own non-negotiable topics at work may be things like:

- Your private life (family relationships, what you do in your personal time...)
- Your appearance or clothes
- Your need to leave on time (for *any* reason!)
- Gossip

Be ready to shut these down with statements like:

- “Oh, I don’t talk about my private life at work.”
- “Thanks, but I’m not looking for feedback about my decision.”
- “Sorry, I have plans/an appointment.”
- “No thanks.”
- “***” (i.e., silence)

That feeling you get

Too much? Okay maybe you’re not a list maker! You can still tell what your *not-going-there* topics are by that twisting, icky feeling you get when someone’s getting close to one.

Please respect that feeling when it hits you!

Realize it means the person is headed straight for a boundary that matters to you. Make a mental note of the person, the circumstances, the request, and the timing.

Be sure you avoid that combo in the future. Just find a reason to be somewhere else when it shows up.



Look ahead

Create a better next time

We can't erase a bad situation once it's already happened. We can only do two things: 1) minimize its impact, and 2) focus on creating a better "next time."

Minimize the impact

First, resist the temptation to get down in the weeds about what happened. Focus only on the facts, not interpretations or opinions. For example:

- "What happened?" FACT: "We missed the deadline."
- "Who was responsible?" FACT: "Purchasing and AP."
- "When?" FACT: "Last Thursday."
- "Why?" FACT: "A few reasons. Primarily a complex negotiation with a key supplier that ran into complications."

Definitely avoid:

- Naming individuals (speak instead in terms of teams, departments, groups...)
- Blaming (as in "It wasn't our fault; Marketing carries the lion's share of the responsibility")
- Providing excuses ("We would have made the deadline, but our workload was too significant").

Great questions

Focusing on the future is a great general life strategy, but it's especially effective for keeping conflicts under control.

The key: high quality questions.

Questions are incredibly powerful because:

- Our brains are programmed to answer them, and
- Good questions can draw a frame around the future we *want* to create. In a tough situation, asking the right

questions can focus everyone's attention on a more hopeful, positive future.

As an example, if we ask negative questions like,

- "Where does Jo get the nerve to say that in front of my manager?"
- "Isn't this the third time this year a client tried to cheat me out of my full fee?"
- "Why did Ali leave me off the meeting invite? What did I ever do to her?"

... our minds will fill with negative, uninspiring ideas and experiences because those are the answers these questions set us up to expect. Our minds go on the lookout for answers that describe disasters and angry situations...answers that focus on the past and maybe evening the score.

On the other hand...

Questions that look ahead to a better future draw a totally different frame around the topic. We can fill that frame with answers about building a better next time.

Here's how this works in practice:

Look back (the past, evening the score, dead end)	Look ahead (the future, building better next time)
"Where does Jo get the nerve to talk to my manager that way about me?"	"How can I build a stronger relationship with Jo so she talks directly to me in the future?"
"Isn't this the third time this year a client tried to cheat me out of my fees?"	"How can I strengthen the language in my contracts so that the project scope and fees are crystal clear?"
"Why did Allie leave me off the meeting invite? What did I ever do to her?"	"What can I do to be sure Allie invites me when my skills are needed?"

In the second column, listen for the language of positive possibility and personal empowerment to make things better:

- “How can I build...?”
- “How can I strengthen...?”
- “What can I do to be sure ...?”

“I build,” “I strengthen,” “I do” ... this is the language of someone who feels empowered to make things better next time.

More examples:

Look back (the past, evening the score, dead end)	Look ahead (the future, building better next time)
“I just can’t get along with them.”	“I want to improve that relationship.”
“His requests are totally unreasonable.”	“He asks for things that stretch my skills, but I’ll give them my best effort.”
“She’s so political. She’ll do anything to get ahead of you.”	“I want to work with her in constructive ways that are also sensitive to her concerns.”
“I worked for six months on that idea, and they dismissed it in less than five minutes.”	“They decided not to go ahead with my idea. But there were a few things they liked. I’m going to see if any of it is salvageable.”

Again, look at the phrases in the second column that signal future-focused personally empowered thinking:

- “I want to improve...”
- “I’ll give them my best effort...”
- “I want to work in constructive ways...”
- “I’m going to...”

Here’s the amazing thing: the **Look back** and the **Look ahead** statements describe the *exact same situation*, just in different ways. This means they’re both factually correct, but the **Look back** statements keep us trapped in the negative energy of the experience, while the **Look ahead** statements open our minds to possibilities and empower us to create them.

Conflict-calming vibe

For our purposes here, just listen for the conflict-calming vibe in the **Look ahead** statements. By focusing on the future where the potential to create something better is (instead of on the past where something went wrong), we focus everyone — and most of all ourselves — on positive possibilities for the future.

Rehashing the past and deciding who to blame just creates a defensive posture in someone, and then a counterattack.

But a practice of looking ahead stops this whole cycle before it can even begin.



Ask for what you do want

Shift the focus to "what can be"

One of the best ways to keep a situation cool at work is to talk about what you *do* want instead of what you *don't* want.

Listen to the difference between: "Don't send my boss on an email about my project without copying me" and "Please copy me on emails about my project. That way, it will be easier to keep everyone informed. Thanks."

In the second example, a few important things are happening: first, by asking for what you *do* want, your request sounds less like a demand. It's the difference between, "Stop doing that" and "Please do this." No matter what "that" and "this" are, positive language sends a subtle but clear message that you want the boundary respected because you value the relationship and want to keep it strong.

The same message stated in positive terms is also much easier to hear. And because it looks forward with confidence that a positive outcome is possible, it encourages cooperation and compromise, preventing conflicts before they have a chance — or a reason — to start.

Easy on the ears = easy to do

Second, you make it easy for the person to deliver. While it's clear what "don't" and "stop" mean, these demands don't help the person replace the behavior with something more positive. "Don't take a break before 10 am" leaves the person wondering, "When exactly is it okay to take a break?"

In the same way, the person who hears, "Don't contact Jim about this" doesn't answer the question, "Okay, but can I talk to someone else about it?"

By talking in positive terms about what you *do* want, you've given the person clear feedback they can act on: "You can take your break at 11:00" and "Lucas is a good person to call about this issue."

You're looking at the situation through a positive lens and talking about "what can be," not just "what is."

Before	After
"Don't talk to my customers without letting me know first."	"Please let me know ahead of time if you need to speak to my customers. That way, we won't be repeating or contradicting each other, and we can look like a solid team in front of the customer."
"You have no right to confront someone on my team."	"If you have a problem with someone on my team, do me a favor and come to me first. That way, I can help you as we work together to resolve it."
"How was I supposed to know it was that important to you?"	"Next time, could you let me know that something is urgent or important to you? That way, I can make it a priority."

Quick note

By using the quality wording in the **After** column, you're making it easy for the person to deliver, with a secret ingredient thrown in: everything that comes after "that way." By talking about how your request will help everyone ("That way, it will be easier to keep everyone in the loop"), you've put it in the context of the greater good. Your request doesn't have a "Do this because it's better for me" or "Do this because I said so" ring to it.

So ask for what you *do* want. Then, use the phrase, "That way..." to introduce a positive mutual benefit that will result.

From Conflict to Calm

Sometimes, all the prevention strategies in the world can't keep a conflict from boiling over.

At work, handling these situations professionally is a must.

Let's go...



Keep the circle small

Go to the source

Okay, super simple: keep any conflict small by dealing with the source *and only the source*. Don't (don't) talk about the conflict with people who aren't involved.

Unless it's done with a good friend as a reality check or to brainstorm a solution, talking about a conflict to people who aren't involved has lots of downsides.

First, it gives the conflict greater exposure — more people will know about it. More exposure also means more of a chance you'll become better known for the conflict than anything else: "Oh, yeah, I know her. She's the one who had that problem with Aiden. I heard it got really ugly for a while." The more the story spreads, the bigger it gets, and the less control you have over where the information ends up. Plus, the tougher it will be for the story to die once the conflict is over.

The list goes on: the more you talk about a conflict, the more you justify its importance and give everyone the message that it's worth your time and attention, that the conflict somehow defines you and your work.

There's more: by the time the story reaches person number 3 or 4, it's probably picked up a few details it didn't have originally. By the time person 6 hears it, it may sound a lot bigger than what actually happened.

Every person who hears about the conflict will have an opinion. Some may start to take sides, attaching your name and reputation to division and strife.

Bottom line: no matter how you choose to handle the conflict, keep it small and contained. Confide only in people you completely trust and then deal only with the person at the source of the conflict.



Change the game

Move in a new direction.

You may have heard some version of the saying, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.”

You keep trying to get an employee to take the initiative, but he won’t. He only does exactly what he’s told to do and not a calorie more. The rest of the team picks up the slack, but their resentment and frustration are growing. The situation is starting to wear on everyone.

No matter how often you ask for more responsibility, the best opportunities go to a coworker who is less qualified. In the meantime, you’re stuck doing work you know isn’t showcasing your talents and may even be dead ending your career.

You’ve tried for months to stop a client from sending you on errands for things he really doesn’t need. When you finally deliver, he ignores you or asks you why you’re bothering him with such trivia. It’s become a significant drain on your time.

In each case, regardless of what you’ve tried, the situation persists.

Let’s make it more interesting by adding a few layers:

- You don’t have the energy to handle a direct confrontation.
- You’re too new to a situation or a company to risk a direct confrontation.
- You’re concerned, given the people involved, that a direct confrontation will be too costly.
- You don’t have time to plan a direct confrontation carefully.
- The person causing all the trouble is a higher level than you.

- For different reasons, personal and professional, you absolutely can't walk away.

Instead of continuing what you've been doing (probably without results), you can change things up: try something totally new.

Take a fresh look at how you've been operating, then take some action in a completely new direction. As that action reestablishes your expertise or command over the situation, there's a ripple effect: by changing *your* game, eventually, you change *the* game. It's a mini-application of the saying: "Be the change you want to see in the world."

Let's get practical

Think of a conflict you're facing or faced recently...

- If you've been hesitant to take action, **step up**.
- If you've been sitting on the sidelines, **get more involved**.
- If you've been too involved in an unhealthy situation, **distance yourself**.
- If you've been trying too hard, **try less**.
- If you've been quiet, **speak up**.
- If you've been talking too much, **hold back**.

When you change your game, you'll notice people responding to you in new ways. They'll have no other choice. Think of it this way: each actor in a play has a role. Everyone must play their part to carry out the plot. If one of the actors (maybe you) were to change their lines, the others would have to change theirs too, and if the script changes, the story changes. If you've said your lines again and again, and from this experience, you know (and don't like) the direction the plot is taking, *change your lines*. The other actors will have no choice but to change theirs.

Actions speak louder

Changing your game can be an especially effective way to end a conflict and bring about positive change. The reason is simple: actions do speak louder than words. Words are invisible and intangible. They express ideas, memories, hopes, demands...all open to interpretation, or *misinterpretation* in a conflict. Actions are visible and tougher to ignore, especially when they're clear and consistent. Change your game, and you send the message: "I

want things to change. I will no longer play my role in this conflict, and the actions I'm taking are telling you this more clearly than my words ever could."



It's theirs, not yours

Don't take it personally

When someone confronts you, try to remember that the hostility is theirs — not yours — and you don't have to take it on, not in that moment...and maybe not at all.

Their actions come from their own issues or past, not yours, and you don't need to let them ruin your day.

Here are some strategies for implementing this:

Keep the person's anger in check by showing respect for their feelings while making it clear that you won't be drawn into the anger.

- "I hear what you're saying."
- "So what you're saying is you were frustrated when you realized..."
- "I understand."
- "Is there something specific I can do for you?"
- "I understand that we think differently about this."
- "I didn't know that would upset you. Thanks for letting me know."

If possible, buy yourself time for the situation to cool down:

- "I can't talk right now. How about 3 this afternoon?"

Don't react to the person; react to the accusation:

No: "You have no right to say that to me!"

Yes: "That's just not true."

Answer sarcasm with sincerity:

Them: "Do you think your report will actually be on time this month for a change?"

You: "Yes, I'll make every effort."

Them: “That’s just typical of the narrow-minded people on your team.”

You: “It’s true, they are really detail-oriented.”

If someone is dragging ancient history into the discussion, say:

- “Let’s just talk about right now.”
- “I’d rather resolve the current issue/event/circumstance.”
- “I think it would be better to move forward, not look back.”

Shift the focus to the future:

- “Let’s talk more about that. When we do, maybe we could also discuss [*my point of view or a possible compromise*].”
- “You’ve given me something to think about. I’m wondering too if you would consider [*my point of view or a possible compromise*].”
- “I’m going to take some time to think about this. At the same time, would you think about [*my point of view or a possible compromise*].”



Listen

Build a bridge: solve a problem

Conflicts intensify for lots of reasons, but one of the most common is lack of listening. We know the drill: the heat starts to rise, someone doesn't like what they're hearing (or they're more interested in getting their own point across), so they stop listening and shut down the conversation by saying something like:

- "You can't be serious."
- "I know what I'm doing. I don't need your opinion."
- "I can't even listen to this because it's so ridiculous."
- "You're wrong."
- "You don't know what you're talking about."
- "You're just making this up."

Whether you're on the phone or in person, and even if what someone is saying upsets you, it's in your best interest to listen. Not only does listening calm the conflict and inch it toward resolution, it gives you information you can't get any other way. Ideas, opinions, biases, preferences, values...people reveal all these and more when they're talking, and especially at times of intense emotion.

You should listen whether you agree with the person or not, and — don't scream — even if they're really annoying. You don't have to like what you're hearing; you just have to listen to it.

One exception

There's an important exception: outright abuse. If someone begins to attack you personally or to get loud and inappropriate, put a stop to it by saying, "Let's just stick to the issue and not bring in anything personal" or "I won't listen if you're going to attack me personally." If this doesn't bring the situation under control, leave. This is not a conversation; it's an attack, and it's not going any place good. You can always try again another time.

Strong bridges

Listening builds strong bridges between people, maybe even some of the strongest. There's just nothing better than knowing that someone is truly listening to you, that they're "getting it." They're willing to try to understand you, and because of that, you're far more likely to want to work with them to resolve the issue.

As you listen...

Zero-in on the facts

Ask fact-based questions to show you're listening: "You said this was yesterday? What time?" or "Who was at the meeting?"

Validate

If someone shows up to a tough discussion ready to fight for their point of view and invalidate yours, your adrenalin instantly spikes, and you dig in your heels, ready for the battle.

But just imagine how you'd react if someone answered you by saying:

- "I hear you."
- "I see what you mean."
- "I get where you're coming from on this."
- "I know what that can be like."
- "I respect your ideas on this."
- "I disagree, but I understand your reaction."

Your defenses would drop. Your anger would cool. Chances are you'd be more willing to hear the person's point of view and more receptive to their ideas for resolving the problem.

You'd feel respected, and if you did decide to compromise or even to back down altogether, you could do it without feeling taken down.

When you show that you understand and respect what someone's saying, no matter how tough it is to hear, the wall between you drops, and you can start to work together through this rough spot. The relationship, a moment ago defined by conflict and differences, feels suddenly cooperative.

...all just by taking the time to listen and validate someone's concerns.

Keep asking questions

Questions are a powerful way to keep control over the energy of a conversation and steer it in a constructive direction. When there's an opening or a pause, manage the mood with questions that probe a little deeper, with a positive focus:

- “If we could fix this, how do you see it working? What’s the best possible outcome?”
- “How would a change be good for everyone involved?”
- “Have you had good experiences with that approach in the past?”

End in neutral

No matter what the outcome, closing with a sincere, “Thanks, I’m glad we talked,” or “I really respect your opinion” is a simple way to say that you appreciate the relationship and value the person.

In closing, try bringing up a neutral topic like the holiday party or weekend plans...anything that gets you off the subject at hand and on to easier ground.



Go time

When compromise isn't possible

Sometimes, try as you might, compromise just isn't possible. The person has made it clear they're not interested in working

things out together. Or maybe you never even had a chance to try. The person's actions have been so destructive, there's just no way to meet in the middle because that would mean you'd have to allow some part of the destructive behavior to continue.

It may be time for an open confrontation about the issue at hand, either in public or in private, depending on the situation. This is fighting fire with fire, and the goal isn't to build a compromise, but to stop a certain behavior immediately.

Since a mistake in judgment can be costly, start by turning to a coworker or mentor you trust. Give them the facts and share what you're planning. Get — and trust — their opinions.

I asked some people to name the kinds of situations they consider worthy of their fire:

- “Hands down, the most serious behavior that requires immediate action: any conflict stemming from unethical or illegal activity.”
- “When someone's out-of-line behavior is threatening an important business goal or safety standard.”
- “When someone repeatedly attacks my work without me there to defend it.”
- “When it's not my ideas or the project that's the target, but me *personally*. For example, if someone were to take an unflattering rumor about me and pass it along as fact.”

- “Someone I call a ‘mistake amplifier,’ a person who takes a mistake I made and makes sure it gets the widest possible publicity.”
- “If I hear a person gossiping about someone on my team.”

The don'ts

When a conflict has reached the point where it's clearly time to fight fire with fire, there's a right way and a wrong way to do it.

First, tempted as you may be, don't ever lose it at work, even when you think you're justified, and even if you believe other people will back you. “Never lose it” means that regardless of what the other person says or does, do not yell, swear, or (please!) cry. These behaviors are never appropriate at work, and there's a good chance that if you indulge in one, your reputation will take a major hit, and you'll lose credibility. You will regret it, instantly or eventually, but you will. And, if taking your side could hurt their image or future in some way, chances are your coworkers won't do it. They've got their own careers and families to think of.

A few more don'ts:

- *Don't skip levels.* Never go over someone's head to their boss to complain about them. It's just not done, and you'll look more like a tattletale than a professional.
- *Don't keep pushing if your leader tells you to let something go.* You've made your case. You've been heard. But business is not a democracy, and you don't get as many votes as your leader does. When the leader makes the final call in a controversy (or any situation), get behind the decision, and push hard.
- *Never send a messenger to fight a battle for you.* Don't send a stand-in to deal with someone so you don't have to or let a colleague speak for you at a controversial meeting. Not only does it look weak, you lose control over the message, and in a dicey situation, you want to have total command over what's being said.

- *Never reply in haste and exasperation to a voice mail or email that angers you.* Take a break. Catch your breath. Your response will always be more balanced after you've taken the time to collect yourself and think.
- *Don't get into a "I said, they said" altercation.* This becomes a war of hearsay. There is no way to win definitively, and you'll just look petty if you try. Deal only in concrete, provable facts.
- *Never try to resolve a really tough situation through email.* Hiding behind email makes you look weak. And since emails are often terse and toneless, they're easily misinterpreted. Email should never be a stand-in for personal contact, especially in a conflict, when it's needed most.
- *Don't respond to attacks on your character, background, or skills.* If someone launches into a personal attack, it's often because they're losing ground on the real issue. It's becoming clear that they're not getting what they want. In frustration, they start to criticize your experience, your communication style, the quality of your thinking, or another personal attribute. This is not a dialogue, it's a verbal assault. If you defend yourself, they may start to pick your defense apart. Before you know it, the issue itself is long gone, and you're arguing over insults. Best strategy: don't respond to the personal criticism. Pretend you didn't even hear it and stick to the issue.

Public or private?

Depends. If conflict arises in public, you may need to respond in public, especially if someone is undermining you in front of people who influence your success. You might need to manage perceptions by confronting the person at a time and place where others can see you do so. You might say as calmly as possible, "I disagree. Here's why..." Then list the facts in simple terms. Next, add, "But rather than go back and forth here, let's hammer this out offline. That way, we won't waste the group's time on this now." (And just listen to yourself take the higher ground as you say, "Let's not waste everyone's time on something so petty.")

The same strategy works when someone repeatedly brings up a mistake you made months earlier just to be certain it gets the widest possible publicity. The next time it happens, right on the spot say, “That was like 100 years ago. It definitely was a learning experience, but so many positive things have happened since then, like [give an example]. Let’s move forward, not look back.”

Behind the scenes

If the conflict is happening just between the two of you, behind the scenes rather than in front of people, a private setting might be your best option for containing the conflict and making your point. Even in private though, and regardless of how angry you feel, resist the urge to open with accusations or sarcasm (“You’ve done it again. Thanks a lot!” or “It’s great to know you’re meddling again!”) that will provoke the other person and be nothing but counterproductive.

Instead, go for a simple, “Do you have a few minutes to talk? I need to discuss something important with you” and then:

- “I’m concerned about...”
- “It makes me uncomfortable to know...”
- “I’d appreciate it if...”
- “I’d like to ask you to stop...”
- “I think we should be careful not to...”

Body language

Be conscious of your body language (your posture, facial expressions, arm and hand gestures, etc.) in a fire-with-fire confrontation. It says a lot.

Think “confident” not “confrontational.” Confident body language communicates your strength and self-confidence. Stand or sit tall, hands relaxed (not clenched in fists), shoulders square and even. If you’re standing, distribute your weight evenly between both feet. Face the person, making direct eye contact. Keep your voice clear and calm. If you’re too angry or agitated to command your body language, take a break to cool off and regroup.

Tongue in check

Avoid “fighting words.” These global statements — too broad and sweeping to be true — escalate hostility to a fever pitch. They include words that describe an absolute state like “always,” “never,” and “every:”

- “This happens every time.”
- “You guys never get it right.”
- “Every time I..., you”
- “You always do this to me.”
- “She never helps out.”
- “It’s always the same story with you...”
- “That is the worst example...”
- “That’s never the case...”
- “Future? This program has no future!”
- “She’s never going to...”
- “No one would ever...”

Read these words aloud and imagine what it’s like to be on the receiving end of them. Fighting words angle for battle, turning up the heat without providing any real information. Because they describe absolutes that are just too broad and sweeping to be true, they tend to provoke the listener to disagree — strongly: “Oh, come on, not EVERY time. Didn’t I send the files on time last week?” or “It’s not true that we NEVER get it right. Just last month we followed up on every proposal that came into this office, which is more than I can say for your team.”

Not only do these counterattacks intensify the conflict, they take the conversation off track. Before you know it, you’re arguing over your different takes on what happened last week or last month, and the real issue is lost.

Instead of mending fences, fighting words pump up negative emotions and hurt your credibility because they’re simply too big and all-inclusive to be believable. Fighting words weaken your position and can get you dismissed as a dramatic hothead who overstates the case unnecessarily.

If you’re prone to dip into your own stash of fighting words, catch yourself. Zip it and take a break. The cost is too great, and the benefits are...well, there aren’t any!



Walk away

...and keep contact to a minimum

Sometimes despite your best efforts, you won't be able to resolve a conflict with someone at work, whether it's a customer, coworker, or even your boss. Changing your approach hasn't worked. Ditto constructive confrontation. You tried to fight fire with fire and got nothing but frustration and more strife.

If you've given it your best, realize that while you may have to work with the person, you don't need to seek out contact or additional collaborations. Do what you must, but keep contact to a minimum.

Walking with class

You've decided that the only way to resolve a specific conflict is to leave it behind you and move on — somewhere else. Maybe you've tried everything for months to make a situation tolerable, but nothing has worked. Maybe you see no positive potential in the job, even if the conflict *could* be resolved.

Leave every work situation (no exceptions!) with complete integrity and, to the greatest extent possible, with your relationships intact.

If you're leaving a job, give at least two weeks' notice and do everything you can to make life simple for the person who will take over your job. Clean up files, leave notes, and finish final assignments.

If you're dropping a client, give at least a month's notice, and recommend another service provider if possible.

If you're quitting a project, don't leave loose ends behind. Finish out your responsibilities to other team members.

Make an effort to say goodbye in person to as many people as possible, and never let on that you're leaving on less than the most positive terms.

- If it's a job you're leaving, it's because you've found a great opportunity somewhere else.
- If you're dropping a client, it's because you're taking your business in new directions and/or you know someone who will be able to service their business better.
- If you're quitting a project, it's because you feel you've done all you can or you're taking on new responsibilities that will take up more of your time.

In every way possible, walk away with the dignity and class that are the hallmarks of your reputation. And when anyone asks you the reason for your departure, especially a potential employer, a colleague, or recruiter, give the same positive answers:

- "I was excited for the next challenge."
- "It was a great experience, but I needed more time to zero in on my true passion for Marketing."
- "I wanted to expand my horizons, though I was very grateful for the growth and the challenges on that project. The people were terrific too."

If you're unable to leave a tough work situation, remember nothing lasts forever. It may take a while, but the conflict will eventually pass. The person will leave the company, you will leave, or one of you will be promoted or transferred. In the meantime, use the conflict to stretch your abilities, deepen your patience, and grow as an employee. After all, the tougher the situation, and the better you handle it, the stronger you become.

Eventually, you'll walk away, holding your head high and saying, "I didn't give in. I didn't lose my temper, and I'm looking forward, not back."

You got this, beautiful someone!

Test drive one or more of these ideas this week. See what works for you.

And starting today, set clear intentions about how you handle conflicts at work:

- “I never lose my cool at work. Ever.”
- “I take the time to prepare for a tough conversation.”
- “I leave every work situation with integrity, no matter how it goes.”
- “I know and respect my non-negotiables.”

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