



# The Four W's of Conflict Resolution

## Frequent Causes of Conflict

- *Misunderstanding*- when individuals do not listen to what is being said.
- *Personality clashes*- when personal “chemistry” does not mix well with others
- *Competition for resources*- when employees believe they are better off competing for resources rather than cooperating.
- *Authority issues*- when employees lack confidence in their leaders or perceive over-use of authority.
- *Lack of cooperation*- when one person does not share information with the whole group.
- *Differences over style*- when agreement does not exist on standard ways of completing a task.
- *Low performance*- when individuals are not working to their potential.
- *Value or goal differences*- when individuals value different outcomes or objectives.

For more information or assistance with conflict in the workplace, contact:

**Conflict Alternatives**

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Barbara is the practice manager of a medical office with five doctors. She is worried about a situation with one of her doctors and some of the support staff. It isn't the first time there has been tension between the staff and the doctor. But this time, the stakes are higher, and she's not sure what to do.

One of the staff members has let it be known that if the situation in the office doesn't change she's either quitting or filing a formal complaint with the EEOC or BOTH. The doctor seems unable to connect with the staff and the staff have become more united in their discontent about the working relationships between the doctor and the staff members. The tension is growing and the problem just doesn't seem to go away, particularly since the new nurse was hired about six months ago. The other doctors and staff in the practice are beginning to be drawn into the conflict and the Managing Physician has let it be known that something has to change! People are taking sides and there is a rumor that one of Barbara's most trusted and valued nurses is going to leave if things don't get better.

One of the most important roles a practice manager has is managing the people in the office, from the doctors to the file clerks, from the RN's to the schedulers. And when decisive steps are not taken at a critical time, the festering problems of conflict and discord can bring significant challenges to an otherwise productive healthcare practice. Knowing how to deal with such a crisis is an important skill for every practice manager. Is there a situation in your office that needs some attention? Not sure how to handle it? Consider these four W's of conflict resolution:



**Who?** Conflict comes from relationships that are not working smoothly. Can these people work things out for themselves? Who can be trusted to add to the tension and who can be trusted to help calm the troubled waters?

**What?** Figuring out the underlying issues are critical to a resolution of conflict. Sometimes what presents itself as “the problem” is only a symptom of something deeper or greater in need of resolution or intervention. Will a “band-aid” work or will surgery be required to bring some health and healing to the situation?

**Where?** Can the tension be addressed in a one-on-one conversation or will it require a meeting of the staff? Will a retreat off site and away from all the other distractions be necessary to get the people involved to focus on the issue?

**When?** Can this be put off any longer? How long has the issue been brewing? When was the last time something like this happened? When do you need a third party who has no “dog in the fight” to assist you in dealing with issues that are about to blow up?

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Don't find fault; find a remedy!

— Henry Ford