

Reducing Conflict 19 Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



When you stop and look at it, most conflict between people in organizations is about things of little consequence. It is the tiny petty annoyances that grind exceedingly small and get on our nerves. Over time, we tend to build up the minor annoyances into mega problems between people.

The phenomenon is not confined to the workplace either. It often happens in the home and has been known to break up marriages.

An acquaintance of mine named Randy Pennington from the National Speaker's Association does a fun little video that illustrates the point rather well.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqLUAm9IBFs>.

After he got married, he discovered that his wife squeezed the toothpaste from the middle of the tube while Randy was a bottom squeezer. He goes through a whole story of how that minor irritation built up in him until he finally exploded. His wife, who had been doing it on purpose, told him, "It's a 79 cent problem."

At work, it is often the close proximity of individuals working together in a cubicle day after day that brings out these petty annoyances until one party cannot take it anymore and open conflict begins. The best defense is to remind yourself that the issue you are getting worked up over is really inconsequential in the long run.

If you see two people in conflict over something trivial, you can get them to describe the true impact of the sin being committed. Often that discussion is enough to get the two people to bury the hatchet.

You can witness two people in conflict where one person has habit 1 that annoys the other person, so he invents habit 2 to get even with his office mate. Back and forth they go escalating the small hurts until the issues become a breaking point.

The best defense when this situation occurs is to try for a rational discussion about the issues and see if the two people can agree to back off. Often when both people realize how they have blown the issues way out of proportion, they can snicker and brush off the problem.

I have seen this situation get so bad that management had to intervene and actually move one person to a different cubicle. That is only a temporary solution because human beings in close proximity do tend to get on each other's nerves eventually.

Conclusion

Recognize that bickering over trivial issues is part of the human condition. Be alert for the signs of a minor problem building into a major issue and intervene early to keep things from blowing up.

Free Video

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on the technique of not sweating the small stuff along with more antidotes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qh1993Zv6-M>

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