

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SECRETS

DISAGREEING WITHOUT DAMAGING RELATIONSHIPS



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‘Disagreements are an inevitable, normal, and healthy part of relating to other people. There is no such thing as a conflict-free work environment. In fact, disagreements- when handled well- have lots of positive outcomes.’ **Harvard Business Review.**

Embracing Disagreements

Suppose you are a citizen of a country with two main political parties, party X and party Y. You identify with the ideals of party Y and several relatives agree with you. However, your parents strongly disagree with your ideals. They are pro party X. Your best friend also identifies more with party X based on her religious beliefs. Considering you do not agree with some of the views, would you unfriend your best friend for not identifying with your belief system? Would you disown your parents? Or would you find ways to co-exist with those differences while still maintaining a healthy relationship with both your parents and friends?

Differences in opinions in the workplace are as normal as the mentioned scenario. They are as common as appraisal meetings. Each organization has employees from different walks of life with different value systems and work ethics. These diversities are bound to create friction in tackling tasks. Frequently, we find ourselves clashing with our superiors, and with those that we outrank.

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These clashes are necessary for improving delivery in the organization because ultimately every employee, no matter how diverse, is trying to achieve the institution's common goals. The challenge comes when we equate a difference in opinion with an attack on our character or ability instead of seeing a difference in perspective. It is important to know how to embrace diversity and handle disagreements in the workplace.

How to approach disagreements.

The most important way to approach a disagreement is to remove the combat mentality. Often when we are confrontational we become emotional, hardly paying attention to what the next person has to say. The key is not to feel attacked because another person's opinion is different from ours. No one has complete monopoly over how tasks should be handled and as such, every member of the organization is allowed to have their take on tackling and performing tasks. If the other person is confrontational, try not to return their aggression. Instead, take the high road and keep as calm as possible. This helps the other person know that you are not attacking them. It helps them leash their aggression and approach the discussion rationally.

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Always approach a disagreement with a level of mutual respect. The other person should not walk out of the discussion feeling belittled or misunderstood. This means being mindful of the tone you use. It also means minding your body language, which can communicate more honestly than the words we speak. Certain actions will communicate the extent to which you value meaningful engagement with the other person. Show that person that they have your undivided attention by listening with an open mind. Make them feel like their contribution matters, although their way may not be how you normally approach your tasks.

Choosing the right forum for a discussion on differences in perspectives is equally important. If you choose to call out or confront someone in the presence of an audience, they are bound to become defensive to protect themselves from potential embarrassment. Onlookers may also bring bias to a debate based on rank or personal convictions on the matters you disagree on with a fellow employee. Where there are clear differences on touchy subjects, keep it private. Invite an independent third party to broker the peace where necessary.

Allow yourself to be flexible. It's rare to find one right way of doing things. The other person is probably equally as passionate about their perspective as you are about your own. Be ready and willing to reach a compromise that embraces both perspectives. The goal at the end of the day should not be recording a personal win but a win for the organization. Arguments are normal but are not worth sabotaging an overall solution, which translates to recognition and reward at the end of a successful task.

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Agree to disagree.

Sometimes, arguments go in circles. Egos may not allow every person involved in the argument to give into a different perspective. At the end of the day, you still have to work together even if you disagree on the matter at hand. So sometimes, it's important to agree to disagree and find ways to come up with a shared solution based on mutual compromise. It might involve taking the issue to a higher authority or a wider audience for a vote in the interest of what is best for the company.

Diversity in the way we approach tasks in the workplace is valuable and beneficial if handled maturely by everyone. Differences in opinions only add value when all parties are willing to envision the other person's approach to problem-solving without feeling ridiculed or belittled for their own opinions. Ultimately, everyone involved should have the bigger picture in mind, a win for the entire organization at the end of each day.

'Collaboration does not always mean agreement. It is how you disagree that keeps the team productive.' **Steve Farber.**