

Step 1: Identify the source of the

conflict. The more information about the cause of the conflict, the more easily it can be resolved. To get the information you will need, use a series of questions to give you an idea of the cause of the problem, like, “When did you feel upset?” “Do you see a relationship between that and this incident?” “How did this incident begin?”

When you are a mediator, you want to give both parties to the conflict the chance to share their side of the story. It will give you a better understanding of the situation, as well as demonstrate your impartiality. As you listen to each disputant, say, “I see” or “uh huh,” to acknowledge the information as well as to encourage them to continue to open up to you.

Step 2: Look beyond the incident.

Often, it is not the situation but the point of view of the situation that causes anger to fester and ultimately leads to a shouting match or other visible and disruptive result.

The source of the conflict might be a minor issue that occurred months before, but the level of stress has grown to the point where the two parties have begun attacking each other personally instead of addressing the real problem. In the calm of your office, you can get them to look beyond the triggering incident to see the real cause. Once again, probing questions will help, like, “What do you think happened here?” or “When do you think the problem between you first arose?”

Step 3: Request solutions.

After getting each party's viewpoint, the next step is to get them to identify how the situation could be changed. Again, question the parties to solicit their ideas: "How can you make things better between you?" As mediator, you have to be an active listener, aware of every verbal nuance, as well as a good reader of body language.

You want to get the disputants to stop fighting and start cooperating, and that means steering the discussion away from finger pointing and toward ways of resolving the conflict.

Step 4: Identify solutions both disputants can support.

You are listening for the most acceptable course of action. Point out the merits of various ideas, not only from each other's perspective, but in terms of the benefits to the organization. For instance, you might suggest the need for greater cooperation and collaboration to effectively address team issues and departmental problems.

Step 5: Agreement.

The mediator needs to get the two parties to shake hands and accept one of the alternatives identified in Step 4. The goal is to reach a negotiated agreement. Some mediators go as far as to write up a contract in which actions and time frames are specified. However, it might be sufficient to meet with the individuals and have them answer these questions: “What action plans will you both put in place to prevent conflicts from arising in the future?” and “What will you do if problems arise in the future?”

This mediation process works between groups as well as individuals.