

## HANDLING CONFLICT: SEEKING A CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATION

**A degree of conflict at work is inevitable and can be creative. How best do you handle conflict with another person so there are constructive outcomes and not destructive consequences?**

**Leaders tell us that approaches that have worked for them include:**

- Asking open questions to demonstrate they want to understand the other person's concerns
- Seeking to lower the emotional temperature through a calm and sincere approach
- Being deliberate in unpacking an issue layer by layer
- Looking for areas where there are mutual interests and objectives
- Allowing silences so that each person can reflect and not just react

**Pitfalls that leaders refer to include:**

- Making assumptions about what the other person thinks
- Failing to recognise their own unconscious bias
- Implying they have superior knowledge
- Letting their own emotional reactions cloud their judgement
- Overcomplicating the conversation with secondary considerations

**These leaders suggest some valuable questions to ask yourself:**

- How best do we develop trust in the way we are engaging?
- What needs to shift in me for this conflict to be defused?
- What type of concession am I prepared to give to resolve the issue?
- What are our points of agreement and how might we build on those?
- Whose perspectives might help us to resolve this?

At some point it may be helpful to let the other person know how you feel, but in a calm and rational manner and not in an emotional outburst. Such openness can enable a conversation to go to a deeper level and allow a sharing of what underlies strongly held views.

This Prompt is one of a series on managing conflict. The next one will be about brokering conflict within and between teams.