

Leader Tool - Recognise conflict signs and create positive outcomes

As the pandemic draws on nerves are becoming noticeably frayed, patience is being tested, and boiling points are lower than ever. When people perceive that they have lost control or lack the ability to control what is happening to them, they may express frustration in different ways. Conflict is often the result when frustrations are unchecked or go unrecognised. We have often spoken about how to use conflict to progress and move forward rather than only as destructive. In this Leader Tool, we explore ways to work through conflict and recognise its triggers.

Managing conflict in a pandemic is tough. Accept that this situation is incredibly difficult for many Australians and will indeed get more difficult. Continuing to maintain a respectful and accepting environment where your people feel they can express their concerns and be supported is vital. Reminding your people that the EAP is there no matter what the nature of their concerns helps to ensure that issues can be addressed and resolved before they escalate.

Create the right types of healthy conflict through encouraging diversity of thought, ways of working, experience and culture to forge teams into more than a group of individuals. Help your people explore and adopt different perspectives. Develop an environment where everyone is given equal opportunity to express themselves. At AccessEAP, we work through alternative opinions by challenging ourselves to be curious and open to new ideas. Being curious is one of our favourite corporate values. You may find inspiration in your corporate values, look at how you could apply one that helps you work through conflict.

Manage emotions. Emotions are contagious, so it is important to listen, be aware and address underlying issues before the emotions impact on others within the workplace. It's unrealistic to expect people not to have emotion, but they need to learn how to effectively manage their emotions. One way to manage emotions in the workplace is for leaders to know how to have a constructive conversation which includes active listening, de-escalation and providing feedback.

Don't forget to manage your own emotions, take a step back and be objective. It's important to model the behavioural response that you want to see in others. Leaders set the tone for organisational culture and communication. Role modelling that behaviour is important as employees become disillusioned if they do not feel heard, and their value isn't acknowledged.

Know your triggers. Mainstream media is particularly effective at drawing us in and playing to our insecurities. Notice the language used when even small numbers of COVID-19 cases are reported such as "spike", "deadly milestone", "outbreak", "cluster spreads". Encourage your people to be aware of the headlines that cause you to become agitated and anxious. It's not about turning off the news. The message we give is to rely on credible media sources such as the Australian Government websites.



Communication is key. You may have heard parents say to their children “use your words” when they are struggling to express frustration. Sometimes it is useful to put the source of frustration into words. Allowing your people the time and space to recognise and become aware of why they are frustrated is important. Once acknowledged, you are in a better position to process, resolve and move forward.

Maintaining mental hygiene. Keep an eye on toxic thoughts! If you are finding yourself increasing your personal judgment of someone else – try to take a step back. Look at ways to find the similarities between yourself and others, as well as the team. Maintaining mental hygiene also means cleaning out ideas and thinking patterns that are old and tired.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

