



SPARA

Accounting
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JOB AID

Dealing with Conflict

A Working Job Aid for Business Owners

Turning difficult conversations — with employees, customers, partners, and vendors — into productive ones.

Diagnose It Before You React

Reframe it. Conflict isn't the problem in your business. Avoiding it is.

Own it. It starts with you — how you process it and work through it, not how the other person behaves.

Move toward it. Go to the friction point. That's where the value in your business actually gets made — with employees, customers, and deals alike.

What Conflict Actually Is

A situation where your concerns or interests differ from someone else's. That's it — no villains. Two valid views and a gap to close.

It rides alongside two things you already do every day as an owner: making decisions and negotiating. The skill isn't avoiding the gap — it's working it.

Find the Root Before You React

Most arguments in a business aren't actually about what they appear to be about. Name the real source and the entire conversation changes.

Facts & Info

You and the other party are working from different data.

Methods

You agree on the goal but not the "how" to get there.

Goals

You're aiming at genuinely different outcomes.

Values

Different things held sacred — the hardest kind to resolve.

Value conflicts cut the deepest. Inside your business, hiring deliberately for shared core values heads most of these off before they start.

Check Your Perspective First

Same facts, different conclusions — and nobody's lying. We each narrate the world from where we happen to be standing, then defend that story as if it were the whole picture.

- The first move isn't to win the story — it's to ask what the other person sees.
- Try: "Help me understand how you're seeing this."
- Perspective gets quietly skewed by role, compensation, and experience — your sales team and your ops team will read the same situation differently, and neither is wrong from where they sit.

Regulate Before You Engage

Conflict spikes the body — cortisol, mental fog, fight-or-flight. An emotional hijack blocks your rational brain entirely. Reset first, every time.

Breathe

4 in · 7 hold · 8 out

Name it

"I'm frustrated
because..."

Find the fear

What's really at stake
here?

Conflict usually hides a fear underneath it — looking incompetent, losing the deal, making a costly mistake. Surface it, in yourself and in the other person, and the temperature drops.

The Cost of Letting It Sit

2.8 hrs

Lost per employee, every week, to
unresolved conflict

\$359B

Lost annually across U.S. workplaces

20–40%

Of a manager's time, in businesses
where conflict goes unmanaged

Unaddressed conflict is already on your payroll. The leaky-roof rule applies: it doesn't dry out on its own — it rots, and the bill gets bigger the longer you wait. The only real question is whether you manage it, or pay for it twice.

Where It Shows Up in Your Business

A customer comes in hot.

Lead with their perspective and the fear underneath it — not your defense. Ask, learn, then solve.

A vendor or supplier drops the ball.

A late shipment right before a big launch? Own your part fast (use I-ACT, below), then move straight to the fix and a better process going forward.

Internal: the "how" vs. the "what."

Sales vs. operations, marketing vs. the floor team — usually a methods or goals gap, not a personality clash. Name the actual source before you assign blame.

Rebuild Trust When You've Broken It — I-ACT

You can't resolve a conflict on a foundation of broken trust. It takes more than an apology — you have to ACT.

I — Initiate

Start the conversation yourself. Don't wait for it to find you.

A — Acknowledge

Name the issue specifically. Apologize for your actual part in it.

C — Concern

Show that you genuinely care about the impact it had on them.

T — Take Action

Commit to something real — then actually follow through.

Sounds like: "Thanks for meeting with me. I own that I missed the handoff, and I'm sorry — I know that put you in a tough spot. Going forward, I'll flag risks 48 hours early. And if you see me slip, tell me."

Choose Your Style — No Single Style Fits All

Your conflict mode is skill plus situation — not a fixed personality. Two dials: how hard you push your own concerns (assertive) and how hard you push theirs (cooperative). Let the situation pick the style, not your habit.

STYLE	USE IT WHEN	IN YOUR BUSINESS
Competing	Speed matters; safety or a core principle is on the line.	A key system goes down — someone has to make the call now.
Collaborating	Stakes are high and you need real buy-in from both sides.	Two department leads split on the right direction for a major initiative.
Compromising	Roughly equal power, time-boxed; a workable middle beats deadlock.	Splitting a tight budget across two genuinely good projects.
Avoiding	The issue is trivial, emotions are hot, or you need facts first.	Letting a heated email thread cool overnight before replying.
Accommodating	You're wrong, it matters more to them, or you're banking goodwill.	Going with their preferred format and moving on.

Run the Conversation — 5 Steps

1 Prepare. Know your own goal and the facts — yours and, as best you can, theirs.

2 Set the stage. Right time, right place, right channel — for them too, not just you.

3 Communicate. Speak clearly. Listen harder than you speak.

4 Focus on solutions. Not what happened — where to go from here.

5 Document & follow up. Capture the commitments. Close the loop.

Listen Like It Matters

Read the nonverbals.

Body language shows fear before the words do.

Don't interrupt.

Let them finish the whole thought.

Paraphrase back.

"Here's what I think I heard..."
— confirm before you act on it.

When the Other Side Won't Play Fair

Some people negotiate in bad faith — a vendor stalling, a customer refusing any accountability. You control only your own reaction. Draw a line, make your decision, and be willing to walk away. Doing the right things can still get you to a resolution — it just might look different than you originally pictured.

A SoftEd Power Skills Field Guide — adapted for business owners.