

HOW TO DEAL WITH FEUDING COWORKERS

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You think your work life would run smoothly if you get along with your coworkers. However, if they're feuding with each other, you could wind up caught in the middle.

Maybe an office romance has turned sour or two junior account executives are competing for one promotion. Maybe 40 hours of togetherness each week is just too much for personalities that are basically incompatible.

Whatever the causes, office conflicts often create stress and lower productivity.

How do you decide whether to intervene or keep your distance? Take a look at these suggestions for navigating a common workplace dilemma.

Tips for Intervening with Feuding Coworkers

You may need to take action if the battles are interfering with your ability to do your job. In some cases, you may also feel like you can help to restore harmony even if it's not part of your job description.

Try these techniques to help resolve these situations:

- 1. Stay neutral. Refuse to choose sides even if you're friendlier with one of the parties involved.** In fact, that may be a valid reason to work harder at overcoming any bias so you can interact effectively with both colleagues.
- 2. Listen.** Demonstrate your willingness to listen to different points of view. Giving each party an opportunity to vent can be constructive as long as you watch out for any signs that it's developing into chronic complaining.

3. **Explain the impact.** Your coworkers may be so caught up in their struggles that they fail to realize how they're affecting the rest of the office. **Letting them know how others feel could motivate them to settle their differences.**

4. **Collaborate on solutions.** Unsolicited advice can be tricky. Ask your coworkers if they want your suggestions. Offer to help them brainstorm their own options for how they can turn the situation around.

5. **Follow up.** To create lasting peace, keep your eyes on the situation. Previous differences may spring back up in different forms.

Tips for Keeping Your Distance from Feuding Coworkers

On the other hand, you may prefer to watch drama on TV instead of dealing with it in the next cubicle. As long as you're not in a supervisory position, you have alternatives to playing peacekeeper.

Consider these ideas:

1. **Document activities.** Office conflicts can muddle communications and pull you in different directions. Be sure to create a paper trail and keep others informed of your activities, so you're less likely to be held responsible for events beyond your control.

2. **Consult your colleagues.** If you're confused about what to do, try to talk with someone you trust. There may be others who share your concerns, and you'll benefit from putting your heads together.

3. **Avoid gossip.** Naturally, discussing your coworkers can be a sensitive subject. Ask yourself if what you're saying is true and helpful.

4. **Approach a third party.** If the office is becoming seriously divided, you may need to report the matter to your boss or to HR. If so, stick to the facts and make it clear that you're eager to do your part to make positive changes.

5. **Encourage morale.** While some differences are more difficult to reconcile than others, **building team spirit can heal minor rifts and prevent others from developing.** Propose activities that bring the company together, like group volunteer projects and occasional parties.

6. **Learn from experience.** Keep in mind that conflict can be beneficial in the long run. Coworkers who learn to overcome their differences may form stronger bonds than those who haven't faced any significant challenges. Conflicts can also teach us more about ourselves and clarify our values.

Office squabbles may sometimes be inevitable, but you can maintain healthy boundaries. Try to empathize with your coworkers while continuing to focus on your own career goals.