

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

How Well Do You Handle Workplace Disagreements?

from the American Counseling Association

While we all have multiple relationships through our family and friends, for most of us the relationships in which we spend the most waking hours are our work relationships.

Disagreements in any relationship can be challenging, but with friends and family we usually find ways to work out our issues. A disagreement on the job, however, especially with someone who has more authority, can be a very difficult and awkward experience.

Even if we feel strongly about an idea, decision or a project, we often feel we have little choice but to follow the boss's wishes. When this occurs we can feel stressed and anxious, and often wish we had handled the situation differently.

If a work disagreement or bad decision occurs because of incomplete or incorrect information, it can usually be fixed by logically and coolly presenting the corrected or updated facts.

But if workplace disagreements are coming from the type of person your boss is and his business style, that's not something you're going to change. Instead, the goal is to use your energy in deciding how you'll manage the situation so that in the end you can feel good about how you handled things.

Start by deciding whether to deal with the problem now or later. Neither is always the best way. Bringing up the problem immediately might make you seem argumentative, but waiting to voice your objections might lead to even bigger problems.

You also want to decide if discussing the problem directly with your boss is the best approach. A calm discussion, handled right, might be very effective. But sometimes talking about the issue with family or friends might help you keep the problem in perspective.

An important step is simply to assess the situation, rather than just reacting quickly. How important is the problem, really? If it is important, consider possible alternative courses of action and evaluate what outcomes each might bring.

After selecting the best alternative, implement it. You should now be able to present a carefully considered discussion of the problem and a possible solution, rather than a heated response to the issue.

Then evaluate the outcome. Yes, the boss will still be the same person, but what you want to consider is whether your approach helped fix the problem, and most importantly, did it make you feel good about how you handled the disagreement?

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

###

words: 393