

Conflict Prevention and De-escalation in Hospitality

By Rachel Thatcher (Service Hospitality)

Conflict prevention and de-escalation in hospitality focuses on recognizing early signs of tension, understanding workplace dynamics and setting clear boundaries to maintain a safe and respectful environment. It emphasizes emotional

self-regulation, empathy and teamwork while using de-escalation techniques and appropriate conflict styles to resolve situations calmly and prevent escalation into workplace violence.

What is Workplace Violence?

Saskatchewan OH&S Regulations, section 3 26(1) defines workplace violence as any attempted, threatened, or actual conduct likely to cause injury, including statements or behaviors that make a worker reasonably fear harm.

Forms of Workplace Violence

- **Verbal:** yelling, swearing, insults, slurs, degrading comments, or threats (in person, by phone, or online).
- **Physical:** pushing, grabbing, hitting, throwing objects, spitting, using or threatening a weapon, or damaging property in a way that could cause harm.
- **Psychological:** intimidation, bullying, harassment, coercion, stalking, or other behaviour meant to control, humiliate, isolate, or create fear (including repeated hostile conduct).

Understanding Workplace Dynamics

Employee Dynamics: Issues such as unclear expectations, uneven workload distribution, or perceived favoritism can create frustration among staff. Recognizing these dynamics early and fostering open communication can prevent conflicts from escalating and promote teamwork.

Customer Dynamics: Guests may become frustrated when their expectations are not met, such as experiencing long wait times, incorrect orders, or feeling

disrespected by staff. External stressors, such as personal problems or previous negative experiences, can also influence their reactions.

Impacts of Workplace Dynamics on Professionalism

When faced with demanding customers or strained interactions with coworkers, emotions such as frustration or anxiety may surface, leading to reactive behaviors, reduced patience, or difficulty focusing on solutions.

Establishing Workplace Boundaries

Boundaries are essential for creating a respectful and safe workplace. They define the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and help ensure everyone feels valued and secure.

Recognizing Escalation

Recognizing verbal, non-verbal, and behavioral cues that signal escalation is essential for maintaining a safe and respectful workplace.

Preventing Escalation

While recognizing early warning signs is crucial, prevention is the ultimate goal in managing workplace conflict. Prevention not only minimizes conflict but also promotes a more harmonious and productive workplace.

Question: What strategies have you previously used to prevent escalation?

Developing De-escalation Skills

When prevention isn't enough, de-escalation can help diffuse a tense situation. Effective de-escalation strategies include using reflective listening, maintaining a non-threatening stance and tone, and offering solutions or alternatives to help resolve the situation calmly.

Enhancing Self-Regulation and Empathy

Self-Regulation: Self-regulation is crucial in the service industry workplace, where high-pressure environments and demanding interactions can escalate into conflict. Employees who can manage their emotions and maintain composure are better equipped to handle difficult situations calmly and professionally, reducing the likelihood of violence.

Building Empathy

Understanding others' frustrations allows us to respond with patience and kindness, fostering a more positive outcome.

Question: What helps you stay empathetic during challenging situations?

Understanding Conflict Styles

Conflict Styles: describe the different ways people typically respond when faced with disagreement or tension. No style is "right" or "wrong", each has strengths and drawbacks depending on the situation.

Common Conflict Styles

Avoiding

Staying away from conflict altogether. Useful when emotions are high or the issue is minor but can leave problems unresolved.

Accommodating

Putting the other person's needs first. Helpful for maintaining relationships, but overuse can lead to resentment.

Competing

Pushing for your own solution. Effective in urgent or safety related situations but may damage relationships if overused.

Compromising

Each person gives up something to reach a middle ground. Practical and fast, though it may not fully satisfy either side.

Collaborating

Working together to find a win win solution. Best for long term solutions but takes time and effort.

Question: How can different conflict styles complement or clash in team dynamics?

The Importance of Teamwork in Workplace Safety
Teamwork is essential for creating a safe and supportive workplace. When employees collaborate effectively, they can share responsibilities, look out situations when needed for one another, and step in to de-escalate tense A workplace that prioritizes teamwork and safety encourages employees to be proactive in protecting and assisting one another.

Key Takeaways

- Proactively recognize conflict triggers and use de-escalation techniques to maintain a calm and safe workplace.
- Practice empathy and self-regulation regularly to stay composed and foster understanding in challenging situations, creating a positive environment.
- Actively collaborate with your team to enhance everyone's safety, ensuring support and value while addressing challenges together.
- Prevent conflict and manage it before it turns into violence, addressing workplace stressors before they escalate into bigger issues.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Thatcher

Was born and raised here in Saskatchewan. She has over a decade of experience in the hospitality industry and is a firm believer in the idea that it is never too late to forge a new path and shift perspectives. Rachel loves gardening, cooking, watching, hearing or reading great stories, walking her dogs, and going on road trips with her husband. Rachel's favourite part about being a Safety Advisor is teaching employers and workers to take health and safety from pages to practice.