

LEAF Method To Conflict

Listen deeply to the other person

This may be difficult for some, but the first step in conflict resolution is to simply stop talking and listen to the other person. "Let the individual say whatever he or she needs to say to you, and do your best not to defend, avoid, ignore, or discount their perspective," Pollack said. And don't just listen so that you can formulate a snappy comeback. Try to really hear what the other person is saying, and let them talk until they're finished.

Empathize with how the person is feeling and why they're upset

The next step is to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Empathize, and try to understand where they are coming from and why they feel a certain way.

"If your goal is conflict resolution or de-escalation, as opposed to defending your position or insisting why you were right, then you'll need to learn to empathize," Pollack said. "This requires some capacity to rise above your own position, your own ego, for just a moment and be there for that person." Aim to create a safe space for people where they feel free to express themselves and their concerns. Strive to tap into what they're feeling. "This does not mean you agree with them but rather that you hear them and understand them as best you can," he said.

Apologize for what you've done that might have caused a problem

Then, apologize for what you may have done that was apparently perceived in a hurtful way. Own your role, Pollack said. "Again, you do not have to agree with them; you do not have to accept that you were wrong and they were right. You simply have to acknowledge that they are in pain and that you did something, perhaps inadvertently, that they perceived as hurtful." Don't apologize for how the other person feels. Saying, "I'm sorry you feel that way," can be condescending and avoids accountability for your actions.

Fix the problem by taking action

Finally, let the other person know how you're going to remedy what you did, and assure them it won't happen again — if that's something you're willing and able to do. If you're not sure how to fix the problem or what exactly there is to fix, then ask, Pollack said. "If, on the other hand, you are clear on what needs to be fixed, let him or her know [what you intend to do] right away, and ask if that suffices."

LEAF Method To Conflict

Now put the whole LEAF approach in action

To understand the LEAF approach in action, consider this scenario. Bob and Mary are coworkers, and Mary is upset because Bob told a joke she found offensive. If Bob wanted to fix this situation, he'd approach Mary, ask her what's wrong, and **listen** to her answer. Then, instead of defending himself, he'd strive to **empathize** and understand how she felt about the joke. Next, he'd **apologize** for telling the joke and making her feel the way she did. Finally, Bob would offer to **fix** the problem, which might sound something like this, Pollack said.