

Coaching to Resolve Conflict

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Description

Conflict coaching is a process whereby a coach or facilitator helps a person or team bring awareness to a conflict, usually by asking skillful and empowering questions, or by helping people practice their approach in conflict scenarios that they can use later in real-life situations. Conflict coaching uses the skills and practices of life coaching, but applies them to conflict situations.

Definition

- **Coaching:** a “creative and thought-provoking process that helps clients maximize their potential in both their personal and professional lives” (International Coaching Federation, 2024)
- **Conflict coaching:** “assisting either an individual or a team to work through a specific conflict and/or learning conflict resolution skills to be more effective in handling conflict generally” (Mediators Beyond Borders International, 2024)

Conflict coaching question¹ examples

- What solutions have you tried so far related to this conflict? What happened?
- Have there been times when you *did* get along with each other or *were* able to handle conflict well? How did you do that?
- In an ideal world, what does a better (work environment, team, relationship) look like?
- Where do you want to be six months from now?
- What are you not talking about that still needs to be discussed?
- What difference would it make if this conflict was resolved?

Coaching tips

Using coaching questions with parties is especially helpful when they are having a hard time moving beyond their own stories of a conflict. Questions should:

- broaden their thinking;
- increase clarity on what part of the conflict is most distressing and what they might do to address it;
- encourage them to take ownership of their part and the solution;
- help them understand what resolution looks like from their perspective;

¹ Questions based on: 1) Bannink, F. (2010). *1,001 Solutions-Focused Questions*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. and 2) Noble, C. (2012). *Conflict Management Coaching: The CINERGY Model*. CINERGY Coaching.

- encourage them to take concrete steps toward resolution.

You don't need to be a professional coach to help people gain perspective on conflict. That said, anyone using coaching questions should be mindful of their role and influence in the situation. Giving advice and sharing possible solutions may be appropriate, but it is important to first let people explore their own path so they are empowered to solve conflicts on their own in the future.

Reflection questions

- Have you ever used a coaching approach in a conflict situation? How did it go?
- Think about a recent conflict you have witnessed at work, at home, or in the community. In what ways would asking conflict coaching questions have helped the parties gain a new perspective? (Look at the list above or develop your own questions)

Resources

Bannink, F. (2010). *1,001 Solutions-Focused Questions*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Noble, C. (2012). *Conflict Management Coaching: The CINERGY Model*. CINERGY Coaching.

Peaceful Leaders Academy (2025, January 14). *What is conflict coaching? Definition, importance and four steps*. <https://peacefulleadersacademy.com/blog/what-is-conflict-coaching/>