

Benefits of Early Conflict Resolution in the Workplace

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When disputes emerge in the workplace, employers either intervene voluntarily or risk being confronted later with a formal complaint or grievance. The costs, both psychic and monetary, are significantly less when addressed in the early, informal stage of the conflict than when employers must react to a complaint or grievance. Therefore, it's useful to consider the differences between resolving disputes early and informally as compared to responding to a dispute that has festered and ventured into the realm of a formal, obligatory response.

Employers who fail to deal with conflict before it escalates into the formal realm are vulnerable to an avalanche of cost consequences. The costs can be measured in stress, suffering of individuals, lost productivity, employee morale – as well as the out-of-pocket expense of formally addressing the dispute. There may also be higher attrition, sabotage, theft and even violence or injuries. After that may come a call from the local human rights commission or the Office of Civil Rights. Not a pretty picture!

The formal stage of conflict resolution can take the form of a complaint (inside or outside the organization), a union grievance or lawsuit. Responding to the dispute at this stage requires the attention of many managers and employees, and legal counsel for all parties. The costs, both direct and indirect, of resolving a formal dispute are substantial.

When conflict in the workplace is addressed at the early, informal stage, there is great potential for minimizing the various costs described above. The sooner a dispute is addressed, the better chance parties have to share apologies, right a wrong, discuss, forgive, establish protocols for future interaction and reconcile their differences.

The Samaritan Center of Puget Sound has an array of services available to employers when their staff is in dispute, including counseling, conflict coaching and mediation. If your organization is experiencing conflict, get in the prevention mode as quickly as possible. Give us a call and we'll work with you to design an intervention strategy that meets the specific needs of your situation.

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