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Six Techniques for Diffusing Anger

By Susan Williams

We've all been there. Some decision made by another department, work area or division of the company has sparked our ire. "How could they do that? What were they thinking?" we ask as we steam. E-mail trails are heavy with accusation, unnuendo and defensiveness. Before we know it, the situation spirals out of control, tempers flare and progress comes to a screeching halt. Even in these kinds of difficult conflicts, however, there is still a chance to change the outcome from stalemate to cooperation.



In my work with some well respected companies, managers complain loudly about the time they spend refereeing between departments or individuals. "Why can't people just get along?" they ask. When I am engaged to diagnose what's happening, invariable, the first symptom of conflict is that the work isn't getting done. People are spending too much of their time in conflict and not in coming to productive agreements. Moral dips low.

Here are a few hints that managers and employees can try to de-escalate the tension:

1. Encourage people to release the tension by "giving them a bucket." Tension is a natural by-product of the decision-making process. A skilled manager lets the other party ventilate pentup anger and frustration without having to participate in it - sort of like giving someone a bucket to fill up with their anger. Catharsis helps.

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**"Don't bargain yourself down
before you get to the table." -**

Carol Frohlinger

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