



How Mismanaged Conflict Affects Retention

A LinkedIn Live Office Hours Event



Attracting and retaining talent is one of the top issues facing organizations today. The [cost of replacing an employee](#) can be as high as 50-60% of their annual salary, when factors such as recruiting, training, and lost productivity are considered. At exit interviews employees often say their reason for leaving is better opportunity, or more pay. Understandably, employees don't want to burn bridges. A primary reason good employees leave is due to [poor leadership and conflict mismanagement](#). This learning guide offers three examples of mismanaged conflict, the act of courage needed and what to know before initiating change.

Mismanagement: The Problem Has Been Going on Too Long		
Briefing	The Act of Courage	What You Need to Know
If a problem has been going on for way too long, either you have allowed it, or you inherited the problem from a previous leader. After speaking at a conference, a leader approached me and said, "The reason I haven't resolved a conflict in my department is that I inherited the problem." "How long have you been leading this department?" I asked. "Twelve years was her reply."	Whether you inherited a problem, or you've let a problem go on too long you can still course-correct if you have the courage to address the problem, set a new boundary and follow through with accountability .	You must understand the culture. Your new limits must be supported at the top. Once upper management agrees with your plan, initiate a group meeting to address the elephant in the room. View this as an opportunity to let go of blame and start a clean slate. Be crystal clear about the behaviors you expect in the future and what the consequences will be if the undesired behaviors continue.

Mismanagement: Held Hostage by Skills and Expertise

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<p>Recently I spoke with a consultant hired to play a key role managing a project portfolio. The problem: One of the high performing directors refused to work with the consultant and wouldn't accept a call to explore ways to work together. The consultant didn't know what to do because she couldn't get support from the Senior VP who had hired her! His loyalty was to his high-conflict, high performer. This is an example of mismanaged conflict, avoidance, and power struggles at high levels.</p>	<p>No matter what your level of leadership, you must address the inappropriate toxic behavior. Rather than focusing on the star performer, focus on the compounding effect of an entitled employee and how lack of collaboration affects the business. This act of courage calls for the leader to stop ignoring the problem and make a courageous decision to support the bigger mission instead of being owned by one person.</p>	<p>You can't afford to be the victim of a high-conflict worker even if they have a superior work product. You're ripping off your team if you allow one person's skills to hold you captive. If you're a middle manager or a consultant caught in the middle with no senior level support, you must make some difficult decisions. Create a strategy to address the leader, no matter what your power position. If you can't get results, play hard-ball, and go forward, to initiate a conversation with the next senior level leader. What covers you here is that you honored the chain of command first. Make the business case for why you need support first by your own boss, and higher up the chain if necessary. (For example, losing a quarter of a million-dollar client would clearly be sufficient as would the cost of losing three key team members.) In the end, be prepared to leave your job. You deserve more and your credibility is dependent upon your willingness to act courageously.</p>

Mismanagement: The Need to be Liked		
Briefing	The Act of Courage	What You Need to Know
Perhaps the greatest barrier to effective conflict management is the need to be liked. This inner drive shows up as over-explaining, sugar-coating, appeasing, and delaying important information to make employees happy in the short term. Mid-level leaders often struggle because they feel caught in the middle between front line employees and senior level leaders.	Mid-level leaders must acquire the skills to initiate difficult conversations upward, laterally and downward to manage conflict effectively. This may require self-study or investing in private coaching if necessary. Beyond skill-building the act of courage is maintaining emotional regulation and letting people feel what they feel without jumping in to rescue feelings.	Midlevel leaders must lead from a multifaceted perspective: advocating for their team while giving feedback to senior leaders about the effectiveness of their strategies. Midlevel leaders need to reframe their position as a bridge between front line employees and senior management, rather than “caught in the middle.”

Conclusion

Conflict is never the real problem. The real problem is ***mismanagement*** of conflict. Mismanagement compounds when blind spots prevent leaders from seeing the patterns that contribute to a toxic work environment leading to unwanted turnover.

This article first appeared in SmartBrief on Leadership.



Marlene Chism works with leaders and their teams to create drama-free cultures that drive growth and reduce costly mistakes. Marlene is known for helping managers address “*the elephant in the room*” and initiate conversations that get results.

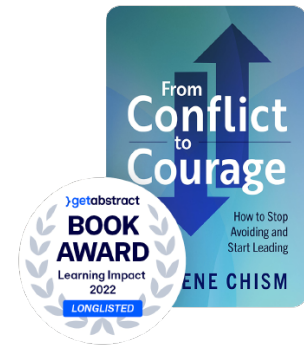
Marlene is a recognized expert on the LinkedIn learning platform, producing five educational video series on topics that include anger management, working with high conflict people, and having difficult conversations.

She has a degree in Communications, a master’s in human resources development, and she’s an advanced practitioner in Narrative coaching.

Her most recent book, *From Conflict to Courage* was nominated for an international award in the category of [Learning Impact](#) by getAbstract.

Services

Services include consulting, coaching, virtual and onsite training. To set up an exploratory call email marlene@marlenechism.com to set a calendar date.



Learning Office Hours

Once a month Marlene Chism offers a live stream short program free of charge on LinkedIn. Sign up at [marlenechism.com/office hours](http://marlenechism.com/office%20hours) to be notified of future live events and get the current downloadable resource.