When facing a conflict, it is normal to feel angry, frustrated, and stressed out. Managing these negative feelings allows you to focus on the situation in a productive way and to avoid doing and saying things that make the conflict worse. Reacting out of anger and frustration is not likely to resolve anything.

**How do I start?**

**Don’t**
- Respond to someone by confronting them out of anger, whether by email or in person; it’ll only make the conflict worse.
- Take things personally; don’t assume other people’s responses are about you.
- “Take the bait” (being provoked / having your buttons pushed).

**Do**
- Calm down to respond more productively.
- Set boundaries and limits; be clear about what you will and will not do.
- Pay attention to people, issues, and situations that can be emotionally difficult.
- Echo name-calling or hostile feedback, calmly and firmly ask:
  “Did I hear you correctly? Did you call me an idiot?” “Can you say that again?”
- Mentally rehearse a calm and rational response when you anticipate a “hot-button” situation.
- Role play difficult situations with your supervisor, a colleague, or someone else so you can try self-control strategies.

Mastering two specific techniques will help you manage your emotions and approach the conflict more productively. These techniques are: practicing delayed response and using non-reactive statements.
Managing Your Emotions (Cont.)

Techniques for staying calm and productive during conflict

Delayed Response

When a conflict catches you by surprise or you are angry at someone, pause and think about the situation before responding.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

1. Pause > maintain composure > step back emotionally.
   - Be aware of your own thoughts and feelings.
   - Sense your physical response.
   - Control your body language: posture, breathing, facial expression, gestures.
   - Consciously change your energy level.

2. Manage the Moment
   - Pay attention to your physical space.
   - Notice where you are by looking at the room.
   - Make an effort to feel the floor beneath your feet.
   - Listen to sounds in the room; notice the light source and people around you.

3. Notice the Person
   - Demeanor, clothing, posture, face, tone of voice, communication style.
   - Once you have done these three steps, then respond.

Other tips:

If you don’t need to respond in the moment, take a few hours or even a day or two, to consider the situation and the most productive way forward.

It is often tempting to vent frustration through email. There’s usually no harm in merely writing such an email, but sending it is often a mistake that makes the conflict worse and fails to resolve anything. If you are tempted to write an email, leave it in your “drafts” mailbox for a day or two. Come back to it and re-read or have a colleague provide feedback. Consider how the recipient is likely to respond. If it seems unlikely to be helpful, find another way to share your views.
Use Non-Reactive Statements

Non-reactive statements help you to calm down anger and frustration and focus on handling the situation productively.

**WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?**

**I see, I feel, I hope & expect, I will ...**

“Next time, I hope you’ll take a deep breath and think twice before venting your anger at your colleagues.”

**When you ... I feel ... because ...**

“When you tell me you agree with my decision but then complain about the decision to others on the team, I feel angry because it undermines my role as the supervisor.”

**In the future, my hope is ... I wish that ...**

“In the future, my hope is that you will feel comfortable asking me for help if you’re feeling stuck and aren’t sure what to do.”

**I will/will not ...**

“I will not respond to name-calling and blaming. I will have a calm, rational conversation about what went wrong and what we need to do to fix it.”

**I notice that ... and I assume that ... Is that true?**

“I notice that you have been missing meetings with the project team. I assume this means that you haven’t finished the work. Is that true?”

**Why vs. What**

WHY can invite escalation, WHAT focuses on behaviors and impact and is more productive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t</th>
<th>Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Why did you say that to Felix?”</td>
<td>“When you told Felix that you didn’t like his idea, I’m curious what you were hoping would happen. Can you help me understand?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**But vs. And**

BUT can escalate conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t</th>
<th>Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I know you want to focus on getting the project plan done, BUT we need you to spend time building a relationship with this donor first.”</td>
<td>“I know you want to focus on getting the project plan done, AND we need you to spend time building a relationship with this donor first.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**You should vs. I would like you to ...**

SHOULD can escalate conflict.

“I would like you to contact this client immediately and explain that we cannot fulfill his request.”