

# Don't Tough It Out: Difficult Situations at Work

TESSA BYER, UNIVERSITY OMBUDS

Below are strategies for some common conflicts you encounter at work.

## SITUATION #1: SOMETHING HAPPENED, AND WE CAN'T GET PAST IT.

1. Separate intent from impact.
2. Move from blame to contribution.
3. Examine your assumptions.
4. Share what you know, and ask about what you don't know.
5. Acknowledge what you hear them say.
6. Seek to understand what is important to them.
7. Ask what they want to see happen next.
8. Brainstorm options, and decide how to move forward together.

## SITUATION #2: SOMEONE IS EMOTIONAL.

1. Check in with your emotions.
2. Give space for their emotions.
3. Acknowledge what you hear them say.
4. Separate their feelings about you from your identity.
5. Ask them what they most need right now.
6. Offer to take a break.
7. Reframe the situation from the past to the future.

## SITUATION #3: I HAVE TO DELIVER UNPOPULAR NEWS.

1. Prepare for the conversation.
2. Get to what you are trying to say.
3. Explain your reasoning. If there's information you can't share, acknowledge that.
4. Listen to their reactions.
5. Acknowledge the negative impact.
6. Give them an opportunity to ask questions.

## SITUATION #4: WE DISLIKE EACH OTHER.

1. Don't force it.
2. Do NOT try to gain followers to "your side."
3. Commit to treat each other with respect.
4. Remember that you can't control how they act or what they think of you.

## SITUATION #5: I'M CAUGHT IN SOMEONE ELSE'S DISAGREEMENT

1. When appropriate, set boundaries and say no.
2. Ask questions and listen to everyone's perspectives.
3. Set an agenda.
4. Withhold your judgment.
5. Bring people together to talk directly.
6. Look for common ground.
7. If you make a decision for them, explain how you came to it.

## SITUATION #6: WE DISAGREE ABOUT SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

1. Understand your communication style.
2. Prepare for the conversation.
3. Share your perspective.
4. Ask about their perspective.
5. Ask what is most important to them.
6. Brainstorm how to move forward.
7. Decide what the best resolution is and how to implement it.

## SITUATION #7: I HAVE TO GIVE OR RECEIVE FEEDBACK.

1. Examine your motives.
2. Don't wait for a year-end review.
3. Put yourself in their shoes.
4. Start by asking why they made a certain choice.
5. Remind them that this is an opportunity for improvement.
6. Offer them a chance to ask questions.
7. Acknowledge their defenses and emotions.
8. Demonstrate a commitment to partnering with them.