

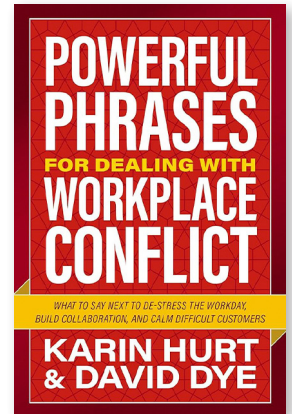


Executive Book Summaries®

Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict

What to Say Next to De-stress the Workday, Build Collaboration, and Calm Difficult Customers

by **Karin Hurt and David Dye**



Contents

What Makes Workplace Conflict So Challenging?

Page 2

Getting Started

Page 2

Rising Above

Page 3

Managing Up

Page 5

Communicating with Difficult People

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

You can't avoid conflict. When there are problems to solve and people who care, you'll face conflict. And if you want to have more success, influence, and joy in your work, you've got to navigate it well. But conflict is hard. You weren't born knowing the perfect words to say when you're angry, dealing with a jerk, or when someone calls your game-changing idea "stupid." That's the reason for this book. *Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict* will give you practical communication techniques to successfully navigate conflict at work. And when you do, you'll get better results, build trust, have more influence, and collaborate better with your coworkers.

You probably didn't learn practical, productive approaches to conflict in school. And, if you're like most of us, you grew up watching role models sometimes really screw it up. You've had some conflicts not go so well yourself, and you don't like how that feels. The Powerful Phrases you'll find in this book are words you can use exactly as written or find your own Powerful Phrase that carries the same meaning, creates the changes, and builds the relationship.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Determine how challenges of workplace conflict are influenced by new factors
- Tips to address conflict constructively through four key dimensions
- Practical "Powerful Phrases" and strategies to use to navigate and resolve conflicts
- Strategies for dealing with different types of difficult coworkers, bosses, and customers

What Makes Workplace Conflict So Challenging?

What's Making Conflict Harder Right Now?

People have had conflict with one another since, well, there have been people. But to give you the most useful tools, we wanted to find out what's happening now. So, we created the World Workplace Conflict and Collaboration Survey (WWCCS) to ask people around the world whether they're experiencing more (or less) conflict at work, what's causing those changes, and the effects of workplace conflict. We've heard from over five thousand people in more than forty-five countries and all fifty of the United States.

If it feels like you're experiencing more conflict at work over the past few years, you're not alone. Seventy percent of the people in our research say that they're experiencing the same or more conflict at work.

The pandemic sped up changes in the workforce. More than ever before, people want meaning in their work. And work itself is changing. The survey results citing continued overwhelm, economic instability, lower levels of motivation, and poor management are symptoms of this upheaval.

Take the increase in anxiety, stress, and depression, mix in the loss of human relationships, and you get more workplace conflict. And it's more intense.

We were sad to read WWCCS comments about alarming discrimination and lack of tolerance or inclusion. For many, these trends are getting worse.

When things change fast or change in big ways, people freak out. Rapid change, major change, and unexpected changes can all increase the likelihood and intensity of conflict.

Social media thrives on conflict. One of the easiest ways to get people to interact is to push their anger and outrage buttons.

We don't share these causes of conflict to discourage you. The point is to understand where the conflict comes from and why it's happening.

What Abouts: Frequent Concerns, Questions, and Why Old Approaches Don't Work

You may be thinking, "Powerful Phrases, really? I'm skeptical. You can't script this stuff."

So, you're right, in that there are almost no "perfect words" for every situation except maybe "thank you," "I apologize."

Apart from those, it's what the words do that matter most—not the words themselves.

"I" statements, sandwich methods, and that nonsense is tired. It doesn't work.

There's a lot of traditional workplace communication wisdom that gets passed on but makes little sense—or just plain won't work in different scenarios.

"My [boss/coworker/customer] is a psychopath. There's nothing I can do that's going to help."

We've heard so many stories of conflict with managers in the WWCCS. We want to encourage you to know that there is hope.

Getting Started: Practical Approaches for Every Workplace Conflict

The Four Dimensions of Constructive Conflict

Every Powerful Phrase in this book addresses one of these dimensions.

1. Connection—Do We Know One Another as Human Beings?
2. Clarity—Do We Have a Shared Understanding of Success?
3. Curiosity—Are We Genuinely Interested in Other Perspectives and What's Possible?
4. Commitment—Do We Have a Clear Agreement?

The Twelve Greatest of All Time Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict

CONNECTION

1. "I care about (you, this team, this project) and I'm confident we can find a solution that we can all work with."
2. "Tell me more."
3. "It sounds like you're feeling . Is that right? [pause for affirmation]. Thank you for letting me know how you feel."

CLARITY

4. "What would a successful outcome do for you?"
5. "Let's start with what we agree on."

Let's start with what we agree on.

6. "What I'm hearing you say is . Do I have that right?"

CURIOSITY

7. "I'm curious how this looks from your perspective."

8. "What do you suggest we do next?"

9. "What can I do to support you right now?"

COMMITMENT

10. "What's one action we can both agree to as a next step?"

11. "So, to recap our conversation, we've agreed to. Is that your understanding?"

12. "Let's schedule some time to talk about this again and see how our solution is working."

Courage Matters: Get More Confidence to Start the Conversation Everyone Wants to Avoid

It's so tempting to ignore conflict at work, but look at the top consequences of conflict from the WWCCS: stress, turnover, lower-quality work, lost productivity. No one needs more of that in their life.

Powerful Phrases to Ask Yourself and Build Your Confidence

"What do I want to happen because of what I say?"

"Why does what I have to say matter?"

"What's preventing me from saying it?"

"What's at stake if I stay silent?"

"What's the worst that can happen here?"

Powerful Phrases to Invite Others into the Conversation

"I'm concerned that we might not be talking about (X). And my hunch is that's because of (Y). Here's why I think we need to have the conversation anyway. What do you think?"

"What are your biggest hopes and fears for this project?"

Beyond Words Harnessing the Power of Body Language and Tone for More Productive Conflict

You can derail any Powerful Phrase with an eye roll, exasperated sigh, or sarcastic tone. When your face doesn't match your words, people believe your face before your words.

Beyond the Drama: How to De-escalate an Emotional Conversation

"I noticed that . . . What's happening for you?"

"You're right . . ."

"Please correct me where I'm wrong. Here's what I'm hearing so far."

"I appreciate you sharing that with me."

"I apologize."

Say Goodbye: How to Know When It's Time to Quit a Conflict

One heartbreaking finding in the World Workplace Conflict and Collaboration Survey was how often people said, "If faced with this conflict again," they would quit, or quit sooner.

"Have I tried?"

"What do I gain or lose by quitting?"

"Is this conflict affecting other areas of my life?"

"Do I feel good about how I'm showing up?"

"Is conflict a pervasive organizational problem, or is it limited to one or two people?"

"Is there another way to accomplish my goal?"

Rising Above: Tackling Tricky Workplace Situations

What to Say When . . . You Need to Say No (Even to Your Boss)

"I've studied this problem extensively. Here's what I know. . ."

Does your data suggest something different?”

“I’m confident that we should take a different approach. Here’s why . . . I’m curious about your perspective.”

“Thank you so much for thinking of me! I’m honored. I’m so sorry I can’t say yes to this right now.”

How to Say No to Values Clashes and Ethics Violations

“Thank you for thinking about this. However, this clearly is (illegal, out of compliance, against this foundational policy). Let’s think a level deeper about the outcome you want, and how we might get there.”

Powerful Phrases to Say No to Your Boss

“I’m deeply committed to the success of the team and to this project. What you’re asking me to do here would mean {x}. Which concerns me because of {y}. An alternative approach might be {a}.”

“This project sounds so exciting. And I can’t take on another thing—unless we reprioritize my current work.”

“I always want to grow and contribute all I can to this company. I don’t think I’m the best fit for the role you’re suggesting because . . .”

What to Say When . . . You Feel Overwhelmed

“What’s most important?”

“If I had to drop a ball here, which ball should that be?”

Powerful Phrases to Ask for What You Need

“I could use some help with this.”

“I have an idea.”

“Here’s what I need.”

Powerful Phrases for Supporting Your Overwhelmed Team

“This is not okay. That can wait.”

“Let’s figure out a different way to do this.”

“I really appreciate you and all you are doing.”

What to Say When You Feel Invisible or Ignored

Here are a few questions to spark your thinking.

“What do people not see that I wish they would? For what

do I want to be known?”

“In what circumstances am I feeling invisible or underappreciated?”

“Is this a place where employee voice matters?”

Powerful Phrases to Share How You Feel or Ask for What You Need

“I’d love to set up some time to talk to you about {x}.”

“Sometimes, I feel isolated in my role. I’d love to explore ways to be included in discussions about {x}.”

“Would you like to grab a (real or virtual) coffee?”

Powerful Phrases to Get Your Voice in the Conversation

“I have an idea that will (insert strategic benefit statement here).”

“Before we leave this conversation, I have something important to add.”

What to Say When Expectations Aren’t Clear

“It seems that we see this differently . . .”

“Here’s the challenge we face . . .”

“Let’s decide how to decide.”

What to Say When You Have Competing Priorities and Conflicting Goals

“I know we’ve had some challenges . . . and I’m committed to finding answers that will work for both of us. Can we talk?”

“What are your goals? What matters most to you and your team here?”

“My understanding is . . . Do you understand it the same way?”

“Will you come with me to talk with our manager so we can clarify what we’re supposed to be doing?”

“How can we . . . ?”

What to Say When You Work in a Matrix Organization

“What does success look like (for this project, for our customers, and for each of us?)”

“Who are our key stakeholders and how will we involve and include them?”

“What is my role in this project? What’s yours?”

Who are our key stakeholders and how will we involve and include them?

“Who owns this decision?”

“Who really needs to be in this meeting?”

What to Say When Your Team Lacks Accountability

Use the INSPIRE method.

Connection and Clarity

I—Initiate the conversation with your intent

N—Notice observable behaviors

S—Support with specific examples

Curiosity

P—Probe with open-ended questions

I—Invite their solution

Commitment

R—Review your agreement

E—Enforce with a scheduled time to revisit your agreement

What to Say When Your Remote or Hybrid Team Is in Conflict

“What does success look like?”

“How and when will we communicate?”

“How can we make the most of our time together?”

What to Say When Others See the World Differently

“My intent for this conversation is . . . so that . . .”

“I’ve noticed that we have different perspectives . . . and would love to learn more.”

“So, what you’re saying is . . . Do I have that right? That’s interesting. And I see it differently.”

“Have you asked . . .”

What to Say When a Team You Lead Can’t Get Along

“What do you want me to know?”

“How might I help here?”

“Should the three (or more) of us talk together?”

“What I’m hearing is . . . What have I missed? What would you add?”

“We are approaching this with different values and styles. Let’s see what we can learn from one another and build a way forward.”

Managing Up When You’re Feeling Down: How to Deal with Conflict with Your Boss

What Do You Say If Your Boss is a Micromanager?

ASK YOURSELF

“How am I doing, really?”

“Can I show or document my success?”

“Is it just me or everyone?”

“Has something significant changed?”

START A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR MICRO-MANAGING BOSS

“I care about our success and want to make sure I’m doing my part.”

“Is there something I’ve missed?”

“Do you have a concern about how . . . ?”

ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT

“I’m hearing . . . Can I commit to . . . ?”

“I want to try . . . Can you and I set a quick meeting to

make sure we're on track?"

What Do You Say if Your Boss Takes Credit for Your Ideas?

"I'm curious, do you think {x} understands my role in this project?"

"People seem to appreciate our work. Do you think {x} understands all that went into this and who was involved?"

"I'm sure this was an oversight, and I'd love your help in making it right. Do you think we could talk with. . ."

What Do You Say if Your Boss Won't Make a Decision?

"What's causing your hesitation?"

"Who else needs to be involved in this kind of decision?"

"I see two options for what to do next (explain options A and B). I recommend we go with option A because . Are you good with that?"

What to Say If Your Boss is a Moody Screamer or Dropper of F-Bombs

"I understand how frustrating this is. I'm deeply concerned too."

"I'm so sorry I screwed this up. Here's what I will do . . ."

"I'm observing a pattern where (specific observations) . . . and I'm wondering . . ."

"I've noticed that when you're frustrated . . . It makes me uncomfortable."

"How can I help?"

What Do You Say if Your Boss Gives You Lazy, Vague, and Frustrating Feedback?

"Thank you. What's working? How can I be more effective?"

"I feel proud about {x} . I'd love your perspective on that. Why do you think it worked well?"

"What specific skills, talents, or behaviors have you observed that allow me to make the greatest contribution?"

"Can we outline what I need to do this year to make 'exceeds' (or whatever your rating equivalent) the obvious rating?"

"I really appreciate your support. And I'm pretty frustrated. This affects my compensation too (if that's true). I'd really like to talk to HR to express my concerns about this."

"I appreciate your desire to help me improve. This is the first time I'm hearing about this. I'm wondering what we could do to set up a more regular cadence of feedback throughout the year, so there are no surprises next time."

"Can you please tell me more? I'd really like to get a better understanding of your concern."

What Do You Say if Your Boss Doesn't Appreciate You or See Your Genius?

"In the next three months, what do you see as one of my biggest strengths to build on, and what's one opportunity to grow?"

"What would an extraordinary year look like for my role?"

"I've been working on {x} and I know how important this is to our strategy. Can we use ten minutes in an upcoming staff meeting so I can update you and the team?"

What Do You Say if Your Boss Thinks You're Too Negative?

"I appreciate you thinking about . . ."

"Here's how we can make sure this succeeds . . ."

"I want to make sure I give your idea the positive attention it warrants. Can we talk tomorrow morning?"

Communicating with Difficult People: The Art of Wooing the Weary and Winning the Whiny

How to Deal With Lazy Coworkers

"Is everything okay?"

"Can we talk about how we can best support one another and the team?"

"I don't want to overstep my role here, but I want to ensure you are aware of the impact on the rest of the team."

How to Deal With Know-It-Alls

"I'm sure your intentions are good. And sometimes, when you tell me what to do, it makes me feel like you question my expertise."

"How do you think that went? What did you notice about the others in the room?"

"If you were in my shoes, what would be your focus?"

“I could really use your help to draw others into the conversation. Do you think you could help me do that?”

“I want to ensure we hear from everyone, so I’m going to set the timer . . .”

How to Deal With Chronic Complainers

“That does sound frustrating. Do you want to make it better?”

“It sounds like you’re concerned about . . .”

“How do you think we can address this?”

How to Deal With Bullies

“I could really use your help . . .”

“Is this the way we’re going to work together?”

“That’s not okay.”

“Nope, I can’t let you talk to me that way.”

“I would like to discuss this issue with you in a private setting.”

“I will not engage in this behavior.”

“I would like to involve HR in this discussion.”

How to Deal With . . . Workplace Gossips

“I’ve got to say that rumor is a lot more interesting than how I actually spend my evenings.”

“Does this conversation feel fair to you?”

“What if we called (insert person whom the rumor is about) and asked for their perspective on this?”

“There’s a lot we don’t know about this. I trust we’ll learn more soon.”

You’ve Got This

Workplace conflict is an inevitable challenge, particularly in today’s rapidly changing environment. This book offers valuable insights into why conflict has intensified and provides practical tools to navigate these complexities. By focusing on the four dimensions of constructive conflict—Connection, Clarity, Curiosity, and Commitment—you can transform challenging interactions into opportunities for growth and collaboration. The Powerful Phrases and strategies outlined in this book are designed to help you address conflicts effectively, build stronger relationships, and create a more harmonious workplace. Remember, mastering conflict is a journey that requires persistence, but with each step, you move closer to a more productive and positive work environment.



Karin Hurt is the CEO and Founder of Let’s Grow Leaders, a global, human-centered leadership development company known for practical tools and training that sticks. She was recently named on Inc’s list of 100 Great Leadership Speakers. Other books include *Courageous Cultures* and *Winning Well*. David Dye is President of Let’s Grow Leaders, a global, human-centered leadership development company known for practical tools and training that sticks. Other books include *Courageous Cultures* and *Winning Well*.

From *Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict: What to Say Next to De-stress the Workday, Build Collaboration, and Calm Difficult Customers* by Karin Hurt and David Dye. Copyright 2024 Karin Hurt and David Dye. Published by arrangement with HarperCollins Leadership, a division of

HarperCollins Focus, LLC. ISBN 978-1400246274. Summary published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright 2024 Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. For permissions and reprints, please contact service@summary.com. 4628