

**CITY OF BOULDER**  
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**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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**WORKPLACE CONFLICT  
POLICY**

**EFFECTIVE DATE: 6/16/1999**



**RONALD A. SECRIST, CITY MANAGER**

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**I. POLICY**

It is the policy of the City of Boulder to expect a workplace standard for employee behavior that is courteous and respectful, even in the event that conflicts arise among employees in the workplace. This standard is intended to foster a workplace that values diversity and individuality among employees and provides supportive mechanisms for resolving workplace conflicts.

**II. PURPOSE OF POLICY**

The purpose of this policy is to articulate an ideal standard of interaction for the workplace. By describing the ideal workplace, employees shall have a standard against which they can evaluate and strive to improve their own workplace interactions. In addition, this policy provides guidelines that employees may use when conflicts arise so that they may attempt to resolve those conflicts. Please note that if an employee believes that the basis of the conflict is because of his/her race, national origin, religion, disability, age, military status, gender or sexual orientation, provisions of the City's Anti-Discrimination/Harassment Policy may apply and should be referred to for guidance.

**III. GUIDELINES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS**

Whenever possible, employees should attempt to resolve conflicts directly with each other. Attached to this policy is a list of simple techniques that can be used by employees to resolve conflicts with others. Employees may also choose to obtain coaching from Human Resources or from the City's EAP (Employee Assistance Program) so that they may prepare themselves to have a productive conversation about a workplace conflict. By resolving conflict quickly and directly, many conflicts can be resolved discreetly and successfully.

If direct action is unsuccessful, or the employee needs assistance in solving the conflict, he/she should involve the supervisor in resolving the conflict. At this level, the supervisor may decide to work directly with individuals involved, or may involve Human Resources staff, the City's EAP, or other trained professionals as appropriate to meet the needs of the individuals circumstance.

If these steps are unsuccessful, or if individual circumstances dictate, employees may engage in a mediation process to develop a plan for resolution of the conflict with the assistance of trained professionals. Supervisors may require employees to participate in mediation as warranted by the circumstances and where attempts at coaching have been unsuccessful.

**IV. SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY**

All managers and supervisors are expected to model courteous and respectful behavior in all interactions, including difficult situations such as taking corrective action or engaging in disagreements. Supervisors shall evaluate and coach employees on appropriate interpersonal behavior in the workplace. Should conflicts arise between or among employees in different workgroups, each respective supervisor will be expected to work toward a resolution that is satisfactory to all affected parties.

**V. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY**

Employees are expected to conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner in all interactions, including those that involve a workplace conflict or disagreement. If an employee is involved in a conflict or dispute, he/she is expected to work toward a resolution that is satisfactory to all affected parties.

**V. CONSTRUCTION AND INTERPRETATION**

Employees who have questions concerning the interpretation or application of this policy are to inquire of the Human Resources/Organizational Effectiveness Department.

**VI. EXCEPTIONS/CHANGE**

This policy supersedes all previous policies covering the same or similar topics. Any exception to this policy may be granted only by the Human Resources Director or the City Manager. This policy may be reviewed and changed at any time.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

1. Careful preparation is the first step to successful conflict resolution. Give yourself time to reflect on your concerns so you are able to communicate them calmly, thoughtfully and clearly. Prepare the other party by letting them know in advance you have something important you want to discuss. Choose a suitable time and location where you can discuss your concerns privately and without interruption. However, problems are generally easier to resolve when they are dealt with promptly, so preparation time should be balanced against the detrimental effects of delay.
2. Try to identify and agree upon common goals and objectives.
3. Identify needs and interests rather than specific solutions to a problem. Consider the other person's needs and interests just as you would have yours considered. Try to listen to the other person as if you were a neutral third party who is uninvolved. Ask for more information if the other person has reached a conclusion that does not make sense to you, rather than challenging his/her assumption.
4. Focus on the problem, not the personalities involved. Focus on what will make the future successful, not what has created problems in the past.
5. If you believe the problem is a personality conflict, focus on the specific behaviors that are causing the problem, not on an assessment or judgement of the personality.
6. Agree upon standards to solve the problem.
7. Be creative, brainstorm, consider many possibilities for solving the problem.
8. Keep talking until you agree upon a solution that best meets the needs and interests of all parties. This is important. Often, when we wish to avoid conflict, we will agree to something quickly rather than hanging in there for something that will really work. If you haven't hit on a solution, identify what specific need or interest has not yet been met and look for a way to modify your best suggestions so far to meet that need or interest.
9. Agree on follow-up and next steps. Agree to get back together at a specific time in the future to check in with each other to see how the solution is working.
10. Consider putting your agreement in writing to avoid future conflicts.
11. If you cannot solve the problem after all of these steps, seek assistance from your manager, HR/OE, or from a professional mediator or facilitator.