

REHUMANIZING YOUR WORKFORCE AMID CONFLICT: REMINDERS FOR TEAM WELL-BEING

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Thank you all for joining us today for this quarter's supervisor webinar: Rehumanizing Your Workforce Amid Conflict, brought to you by Federal Occupational Health's Employee Assistance Program. Presenting for us today is Desiree Antonacci: Desiree is a licensed clinical social worker in Maryland and Washington, DC and is an employee assistance specialist. She has more than 27 years of clinical experience counseling individuals, couples, groups, children, and families in a variety of settings, and has provided cognitive-behavioral counseling, solution-focused interventions, case management, and psychoeducation to a wide range of clients. Additionally, Ms. Antonacci has extensive employee assistance program experience in the federal workplace. She joined Federal Occupational Health's Employee Assistance and WorkLife Programs in 2015 and is a Senior Field Consultant serving Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services within HHS. Desiree earned her undergraduate degree in Psychology from Adelphi University in Garden City, New York and her Master of Social Work degree from Fordham University in Tarrytown, New York.

Thanks so much for being here today, Desiree! I'll let you take it from here.

Thank you so much for that wonderful introduction. Good day wherever you are. I am so excited you were able to take some time out of your busy schedules and attend this webinar. Rehumanizing Your Workforce Amid Conflict . As Jessica mentioned, we invite you to participate as much as you feel comfortable. One bit of housekeeping, for me, since I am off-camera, I am finding that I have to explain certain things. I would like to share the following information. If it sounds like I might be reading an example, chances are I am. There are certain languages I want to make sure I am capturing and if I am ad-libbing, I might forget the word that I want to use, so I might be reading some examples. If I sound like I am pausing, I am. It is intentional. And if it sounds like I might be repeating something, that is also intentional. Now that I have that out of the way, let's move to the introduction. I would like to take just a moment for this introduction and read this quote which is, leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to tears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive live behavior. In this --this quote is from doctor Brown and she is an author and well known for her research on vulnerability and even leadership. This quote really does sum up the entire webinar. Conflict , whether we like it or not, is inevitable and is part of our everyday lives. It is present in our homes, present at work, and other organizations and it is present at school and even the world around us. Finding ways to have those sometimes difficult yet important and respectful conversations is crucial in maintaining productive and positive relationships. So, when you think about it, civility and conflict go hand in hand. It is not only what

is said, it is how it is said, it is the internal filter that we take the information that was said to us, and the way that it was delivered. Or even the method that it was delivered. In fact, taking that one step further, our reactions to the situation is just as important as what was said and how we take that in. Because that can definitely be the determining factor in what happens next. We have a full agenda for the next hour. We will be going over some definitions, we will be looking at ways to see employees in a different light, we will be reviewing the pros and cons of conflict, some strategies, some pitfalls, and even some common types of workplace contention. We have a lot of thought-provoking questions and a lot of examples. So I would like to start off with a poll. When encountering conflict you say to yourself , and what I would like you to do is think about that for just a moment. Select your answer from the panel and the options are when encountering conflict, you say to yourself , oh, I am steering clear of that. Bring it on. What can I do to ease the tension? I wonder what's going on. And sigh. Can we all just get along?

I will pull up the poll result now.

All right. wow. I'm seeing the top here is , most people responded , I wonder what is going on? What can I do to ease the tension X followed by , can't we all just get along? And, then, bring it on. What can I do? Then if you said , I'm steering clear of that. Thank you so much. Thank you for participating in the first poll that we had. And, this leads us into the next poll. Which is when you think of civility, what comes to mind? And here, select as many as you find are appropriate that answer the question. A, respect, B, acknowledgment of another person view, C, politeness, D, something else, or E, what's civility?

You have about five seconds to get your answers in.

There are the results.

All right. so, this is wonderful. We have the top one being respect. Followed by at knowledge meant and politeness, and we have a couple that said something else and what's civility? This is really awesome and thank you for answering these because this helps give an idea. We will talk about this in a moment, about having shared meaning about what certain words mean. So we talked about civility as well as we also talked about conflict. Right now, it sounds like you all have a good handle and some of this will be a review. We have a number of key terms listed. So, having those key terms listed and , actually, for us to discuss them and have a shared meaning is really important so that way when we talk about them they mean the same thing to us. Sometimes, as we looked at the civility poll, it may mean different things to different people , as is conflict, conflict resolution, conflict management, and even the word on top, rehumanized. When we rehumanize someone, we restore those human qualities to something or someone but it is really seeing people in a multifaceted way. For example, you have a number of employees on your team, but each of those employees, and , even you if you think about it, we all have different facets to us. We are an employee, we may be a partner, we may be a child, we may be a sibling, we may be a friend, we may be a caregiver. So, often times, when we interact with other people, seeing them in a 360 viewpoint, helps intervene. Civility, when we talk about civility, is caring about one's identity but also understanding and respecting someone's belief

without putting them down or what they believe in and who they are in the process. Then we have the conflict resolution and conflict management, which is either the conflict resolution is the normal and informal processes we use to find resolution. In sometimes we have to use conflict management, which means we cannot resolve the problem in that moment, however, we still need to work through some things and we need to work in the face of that conflict because things don't stop. Our work does not stop when there is a conflict, so time sometimes we have to find those work-arounds. So, a little bit of this is six. In a 2020 study done by my perfect resume, they found that the main sources of conflict within teams are focused on stress about the work, lack of teamwork, lack of transparency, and rude behavior. Conflicts arise when people from different backgrounds and personalities get together and work together or we interact with each other. Something to note, when you see strong reactions to a situation, that usually means there is something deeper going on. That it may not just be about the situation that you are discussing. Was any of that a surprise to you? About the different types of conflict? That lack of teamwork? Transparency? Stress about work? And rude behavior? It was to me. So, there are many different types of conflict. Most conflicts can really fall into three categories. That is task-based, relational, and value-based. So, the first one we will take a look at is task based. This is a tangible issue and something related to the workload, deliverables, expectations about policies and procedures, about how they should be implemented. Think about performance reviews here. The pros of this, it is the easiest of all the conflicts to resolve. You might result with new processes and even increase problem-solving. And if it is not monitored, it can lead to a lot of disengagement, loss of productivity, and even some resentment. I would like to take a look at an example now. We have Chris, and Chris is a longtime employee and Tracy is a newer employee. Tracy approaches and they are both working on a shared project. Tracy approaches these tasks with so much preparation, very methodical, and Chris doesn't spend as much time yet still get the job done. This lead to conflict. But why? The work is getting done. If we think about it, Tracy feels that Chris's lack of preparation might be a barrier to the quality of their work. Tracy, not liking conflict, yet wanting to resolve the issue approaches Chris. They talk about the different styles and their different approaches and they also find a common ground. They brainstorm new ways to share what is going on in terms of their project and their work. So, this way they both feel like they are doing their fair share. The next type of conflict is relational. And that is brought about by differences in our communication styles in our personalities. This is the more of the difficult of the three to resolve. The pros are the best case, it opens the door to new perspectives and aid in problem solving. However, not everybody wants to see another side of the situation. And, because it involves our personalities and the way we naturally communicate, it becomes more of a challenge. And if you think about in today's hybrid work environment, we often lose the context in our communication because so much of it is done electronically. Or either some method of messaging, email, some kind of other chat, maybe zoom, we have all these different methods to communicate now. A lot of times, because we are not seeing each other, we miss out on the natural cues of facial expression and even body language. Now, what I even did in the very beginning, explain what we are doing so when we are, if we are on camera and not face-to-face, if you're looking behind your lab top, someone may say they are not paying attention. Or you're just looking at a calendar sitting behind you on the other side of your screen. If somebody is looking down, they are disinterested. And maybe even scrolling on their phone. And in reality they are taking notes or reading something that they had

just written. So, because of the changes that we have in the way that we communicate on a day-to-day level in our filter about what is happening, when we taken that information it can most definitely lead to misunderstandings. To take that one step further , political, generational, and even religious differences can come off as discriminatory and even be misconstrued as microaggressions. So, what might seem like this very simple exchange can go from zero to 100 very quickly , leaving you feeling very, very confused as to what just happened . And also really frustrated. So no when you're audit --knowing your audience and knowing your team as well as a type of conflict and something we will talk about soon which is the way we respond to conflict, will help you combat this. The last is value based and this is our third conflict. This is not about by differences in our work ethic and personal values. Again, the pros, it increases communication and increases cooperation and, again, sometimes people can see somebody else's point of view and that impacts how it is resolved. So, a common issue that we hear a lot is , let's say, you have two employees working together on a project. One of them once you leave work on time because they want to see their child 's soccer game. Or they have something else they want to attend. And the other coworker expects them to stay, either online or at work , so they can complete the assignment. They definitely have two different ways that they are going about that same project that needs to take place. So, as a result, there may be some increased tension. Yet, they have different values. One is valuing what is happening with a family member and the other one is saying work is more important. And that can impact how they reach that goal. Let's shift our focus just for a moment and look at the pros and cons of conflict. Yes, I said pros of conflict. Stay with us because I know you are wondering , pros of conflict? We will start with the cons of conflict. I want to stay on the slide for a moment and go over some of the data that is here. A whopping 2.8 hours are spent on an average per week dealing with conflict. So, that leads to 2 1/2 weeks of lost productivity each year. That is just like mind-boggling. And, according to that same 2020 study that I mentioned earlier from my perfect resume, 80% of employees lost work time worrying about a conflict. And /or felt offended by emails, messages, or comments that were made during videoconferences. Followed by commitment and performance declining , losing work time because they are avoiding the person who is responsible for who they think is responsible, and even contemplated leaving work over the conflict. So, as you can tell so much time and energy is spent on conflict , conflict management, and conflict resolution. This data reflects that if conflicts are not addressed, they can cause issues that lead to the motivation, conduct, performance issues, and even overall well-being. So, basically, in its simplest form, stress and conflict are super expensive. Not only to agencies, but to all of us. Yes, now we're on to the pros of conflict. We have , and think of the pro of conflict, a day without conflict sounds magical. Right? Where everybody just agrees and there are no issues. There is a real upside for conflict. Out of crisis comes opportunity. The results in one of the pros of conflict can be increased problem-solving, being able to see another perspective, improved communication, yet if there were no conflicts, life would be pretty boring. We would all agree on the same thing, there would be no new perspective is, no new productivity, so everything would be the same . Everything will be wonderful all of the time. Again, out of crisis comes those opportunities. We -- really being able -- things would just be status quo. So in the very beginning we talked about the three different types of conflict. Now I would like to take a look at the conflict response styles and there are five of them. A little bit of history. In the 1970s, Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kelman developed the conflict resolution model called the Thomas-Kelman model. Basically, the

premises that knowing about how someone response to conflict can be superhelpful with different ways to intervene. First up is avoiding. This style is --it does not like conflict and looks the other way or even checks out of the situation entirely. Some of the positives of avoiding can be that short-term solutions, especially if you need to gather additional information or if emotions are high, however, it may not address the problem long-term. People can feel ignored. So, a strategy to combat this is if or when you find yourself avoiding you are thinking of a solution or waiting for someone to get back to you, let the personnel what is happening and why there is a delay. This way they don't assume , which is something we will talk about in a cup of minutes, this way it increases transparency and lets the personnel that you are on it. As opposed to just not addressing it and thinking that maybe either their email or their concern is just kind of falling to the wayside and it is not important. The second is competing. There are some advantages to competing and competing is really, I think, making a decision, but not having any regard for the entire team. This happens and can be a great advantage if you have to make a decision quickly. There's also a downside. Right? The downside is people could feel unsatisfied and may even walk away feeling like , why ask us if you're going to take over? I would like to look at an example of competing. We have Morgan and Morgan is the head of the department. Morgan's team was tasked with putting together an all staff meeting. However, during the planning no one could agree because there was a time line and they needed to have it within a month. Morgan stepped in and made the decision that the staff meeting will be held virtually. Which, of course, handled the matter , settled everything within the time frame it needed to be handled, however, as I mentioned earlier, it really could leave someone saying, well you asked us to do this and now you are taking over, so why? It may demotivate somebody. But the other piece of that is that when we do that, and we can do that once it is okay, twice, okay , too, but when we do it on a regular basis, it loses its effect. The positive is that when a decision has to be made quickly, the team, going back to this example, but I felt like, well, what a relief. We don't have to do anything. And, usually, the take away would be , unfortunately, why bother doing anything because they will just take over anyway. The fourth or the third , is a comedy. Started -- -- accommodating. The advantage here is, again, if you need to make a quick and peaceful resolution, it can like conflict and we have another good example of accommodation. And, also, of a strategy. Take for example having a planning meeting for a newsletter. Billy is adamant that topic a is the best choice. But Bobby thinks that topic B is the better choice but decided to let Billy have the topic of choice. This way they avoid the conflict and also avoid further discussion. Now, in the moment , that could work really great. However, if that is something that he does on a regular basis, that could be extremely demotivating. So your strategy , as a manager, could really be when working with Bobby is having frequent check ins , eliciting additional ideas, both individually and also in a group setting , to really help them get more comfortable and taking ownership over their idea and not allowing someone else to take over. Compromising. Where everybody gets pretty much what they want. Although, not always equitable, --and left, but not least, collaboration. Where everyone just about get something of what they want. This is the most effective method that is used for conflict resolution and conflict management. This is especially helpful if there is a history of conflict. Though the disadvantage is there is some accommodation and compromise needed, for everybody to get on the same page to achieve collaboration. So, now that we have reviewed the five collaboration, compromise, accommodating, competing, and avoiding, let's take another poll. Before we go ahead and start

that, though, I would just like to take a moment and just do a little bit of reflection. Even though we know , and we've talked about to this time, we react differently to different people, different situations, and even conflict. We typically have a go to style. Which one do you think you use the most? A is avoiding, B is competing, C is accommodating, D is compromising and he is collaborative. --D is collaborative. >> I'm getting it pulled up right now.

No worries. We have about 15 seconds left. Lots of mentors coming in so far. Thank you. Just about three more seconds and we will reveal the results. There you go.

Okay. All right. Okay. Okay. So, we've got collaborative followed by accommodating, followed by compromising, followed by avoiding, followed by competing. All right. Thank you so much. So, let's say here for just one moment. Now that you have identified your style, you may want to consider asking yourself , the next time there is a conflict, is my preferred style the best I can use? Or might there be a different style that could be better and that situation? Handling conflict with care. We had some strategies of dues and things to avoid. There is really no right way to handle conflict. Wouldn't that be amazing? Just having one toolkit for everything? 01 -- this is what I need to do? That would be awesome. However, we haven't found that yet. Yet, knowing your teams and your conflict styles and conflict resolution styles are really key in helping develop those effective, resolutions, to those difficult situations that come up on a regular basis. Things to think about, things to steer clear of when possible , is assuming. There is even a quote about what happens when you assume. When we assume we often forecast something that might happen even though we have no evidence. Another is responding when emotions are high and this happens. In an article by psychology today, a great strategy is pausing before responding. Pausing before responding allows you to, one, collect your thoughts, take a breath, and really get a handle on what you are thinking and what you were feeling. This is a great way to set the stage for a difficult conversation or if you start to feel that your emotions are starting to bubble up . One of my personal favorites , the use of the word but. An example, your newsletter has some really great content but it has a lot of mistakes. While that may be true, it really does minimize what the employee has been doing right. So, a really great strategy is to use the word and. I will take that same example and I will take out the word but and I will put and in. I have had time to look at your newsletter and it has some really great content and during my review I noticed a few mistakes. Let's meet this afternoon to review them together. While you are introducing something new, you sound much less negative. Another is emailing our messaging high-stakes conversations, especially if we think about when emotions are high. This is something that we hear a lot of. When you get an upsetting email from someone who was pushing your buttons, it is super zero attempting to respond and fire back -- super attempting to respond and fire back, but the do it. Please don't do it. Take a moment and pause before responding. Remember, high-stakes conversations should really be done face-to-face when possible or be a videoconference as a secondary way to handle those conversations with care. If we don't and we just start going back and forth, it could lead to the you said, they said, you said, basic, and nothing gets resolved. Respond only to acknowledge and set up a time to meet to discuss any concerns whether they are on your end or on the team members ' end. Now some strategies of what to do. When in doubt, check it out. Listen without interrupting. Communicate early and often. Discussed one issue at a time. I know it is --it happens and we get upset and we throw all these different things

that happen, we start up with one issue and the next thing you know we are addressing four or five different rings. Stick to one thing at a time. Focus on what can be changed and be very clear, concrete, and specific. Take responsibility so you can use I statements and when in doubt check those out. Elicit conversations from the team are from the employee about what they might think that they could do to change this. So, rehumanizing, that word rehumanizing as if we are not human, it is looking at people in a multifaceted manner. And Colin Powell is quoted as saying, as a leader, you set the tone for the entire team. If you are calm, your employees will most likely be the same way. We are all multifaceted and we may not always know what is going on with someone, so don't assume. When in doubt, check it out. So fostering civility. The one thing with being civil and some get confused, just because --to be civil doesn't mean we can't agree and have different opinions. Just being able to communicate our differences in a way that is respect for. --respectful. Just like we did at the very beginning and we talked about shared key terms and definitions, it may be helpful to do the same thing with your team. So, Bryan Cave is a law firm and they created a coda civility. They say that we agree --weekly and knowledge each other. We say please and thank you. We treat each other equally. We respect each other's time commitments. So, when we are not working, we are not working and when the meeting is over, the meeting is over. We treat each other equally with respect no matter what. And, this is something that you can even do on a call. You can use this code or create something similar. Write your own guidelines for your teams' culture. This creates more cohesiveness, and definitely fosters accountability. We also looked at modeling behavior. You want to be that thermostat, not the thermometer. When in doubt, check it out. As a manager, your employees look to you for support and look to for guidance. And even accountability. So, keeping this in mind, it can definitely help when you're navigating stressful situations. Acknowledging strength in yourself and others as well as what can get in the way of achieving resolution. It is really easy to sit in --in judgment and hard to prep this grace. --practice grace. Arriving at solutions together. When in doubt, check it out. Find a place that is private to talk. If you're in person, it is not in front of everyone. You are finding a place away from everyone that you had that conversation. Find out what is going on and what the sources are and what everybody has to say. What is the ask? What do people want? And then, this way, you can agree on the best possible solution or direct a solution. It can also evaluate progress on an ongoing basis, especially if there's something going on. This way you can say, well, we have the steam conflict and it seems to be space, so why don't we check in a week or two weeks to see how that is going? This way, it is not just a one and done conversation, but ongoing conversations and making sure you are keeping the pulse of what is going on on the teams. It is also went to take control and went to hit the pause button and say we need to reconvene and take a moment. Also, you want to empower folks. Empower them to come to you not only with an issue and also a potential solution. Rather than just coming to you and saying, this is what's happening. You need to fix it. Sometimes, as a manager, you don't always have the skills, the tools, the support, and even the time and it is really easy to put off dealing with conflict and just focusing on the work. There are so many tools available for you. From agency trainings and materials for you and your employees, to mentorship and to contacting labor relations and finding out if there is a mediation program. Looking to agency policies and even EAP. EAP can provide manager support for you for either a specific situation that you are dealing with, either how to engage in employee are talked about EAP, and it can even be for professional development through the management skills consultation

program. We even have on our website a supervisor support section where you can look at archived webinars, newsletters, and much more to support you in your role. You can even invite us to a staff call to review available benefits. As we talked about, conflict is inevitable, yet it can bring about positive changes. Part of being an effective leader is really knowing how to communicate and work with different personalities . It is definitely a balancing act. Sometimes you are empowering someone to problem solve and other times you are steering the ship. All while being respectful and arriving or trying to arrive at the best possible solution. For not only you and also for your team. So, here are some amazing resources for your toolbox. There is a great assessment tool on workplace civility. I thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to attend today's webinar and hope you are able to glean some information from our time together. Jessica, I am going to turn it back over to you.

Thank you. We will get to your questions in a second but if you want more information about this or other topics, give us a call or visit us online at FOH4You.com . As a reminder, the recording and transcript and a copy of the slides and resource handout will be emailed to you within 24 hours following the session. All of the content will be available on FOH4You.com in about two weeks. When you exit, you will see a status action survey to rate us on how we did today. We do read all the comments ever to make adjustments based on the feedback so we appreciate you filling out the survey. We have a few minutes for questions. If you have something you would like to ask, put it in the Q&A panel and send it to all panelists. The first question we have is, I have an upset employee who is threatened equal employment action against me. How do I refer them to the EAP without making the problem worse?

What a great question. One way is to talk generally about some of the benefits that are available. Letting them also know about the available agency resources that might be able to help them. So, just letting them know that they can speak with someone confidentially if there is something they would like to talk about. And it is at no cost to them 24 hours a day seven days a week 365 days a year. That might help support them in their concern for what is happening. That is something you can definitely call us one on one and we can help you individually with that specific situation.

Great. The next question says, what if the situation involves more than one type of conflict? For example, if it stems from the relationship, deliverables, and opposing values?

What a great question. A lot of our different conflicts , a lot of our conflicts can be lumped into those three different categories. However, they do overlap. It is really taking that moment to find out what is going on to really listen and find out what they are asking for. This way you can find the best way to intervene.

Thank you. The next question says, I have difficulty dealing with conflict on my team. Can the EAP help me with that and grow as a manager?

Absolutely. As I mentioned, probably a couple slides ago, EAP can be used for specific situations, where you can call and get some information about how to deal with something, but also, in

terms of professional development, we do have a management skills consultation program which can definitely help you grow as a manager.

All right. The next question says, my team has an issue with an employee who I happen to know is dealing with some personal issues. I don't want to make it worse, so how do I bring out --bring up the issues. --

There are a couple ways. One, you can speak with the employee and by doing those frequent touch bases with all employees who often get more information, often times they are the first person you are either the first or second person that will notice something. So, when you notice or hearing things from other team members, you may approach them with something like the following. You know, sometimes issues like these are a result of things that are going on whether in or outside the work place. While this may not be true in your case, and it is none of my business, however, I am here to support you. I want you to know that the agency, our agency, actually, has an employee assistance program and can help with all different kinds of concerns. It is voluntary, confidential, and at no cost and I can even provide you that toll-free number if you would like to give them a call. Of course it is totally up to you. I will not know if you call or made an appointment. So, just letting someone know very generally that you may notice something and here is a benefit, the EAP benefit, you can also have EAP come onto a staff call and provide an overview of all of the different benefits. Not only does this include you as a manager but all employees will hear about the benefit. Great question.

Thank you. The next question is, I am very busy and don't have time to deal with employees who aren't getting along. They are adults and should know better. Can I just tell them to figure it out?

Well, yes. You can. However, I don't know if that is going to be the most helpful resolution. As I mentioned in the very beginning with the quote, we do have to spend some time investing in our team. And I know that there's more time being invested when people are productive so, finding those little tiny ways to carve out some time to assist people and also letting people know about all the resources that are available to them. You can also give us a call and we can help you with more strategies.

Thank you. A couple questions about mediation so I will try to sum it up here. Can the EAP mediate issues between two employees or facilitate conversations to help with standards of conduct?

Great question. So, EAP can be used by employees and it can be used by managers. However, typically, we would work with either the manager or the individual separately. We would not -- what I will say is the agency typically has a mediation program to assist with employees and team members who are not getting along. They do facilitate conversations. >> I have a couple questions about similar things so let me try to sum those up as well. What if people in the workplace just don't like each other? How can we overcome biases either as a manager about employees or the prospective in general?

That's a great question and it goes back to , you know, finding some things that people can bond over. We are not going to like everybody we work with but the goal is we respect each other. Finding ways to find common similarities and also reviewing some guidelines for team culture , meaning going back to Bryan Cave, in this way, while -- Bryan Cave's code of civility, -- how we can help structure those conversations. Great question. >> Thank you.

I think that is all the questions I have seen so far. I appreciate you guys sending those, but if you did not ask your question today, please feel free to call the EAP and talk to someone who can help you with your specific need or concern. With that I would like to thank Desiree Antonacci for presenting today and to thank you all for taking time to be with us here today. Have a wonderful rest of your week.

[Event Concluded]