

## Conflict Management Styles Explained

**Competing** – Competing is assertive and uncooperative behavior, embodied in the parties' pursuit of their own concerns at others' expense. Competing behavior is often used by power-oriented people who will use every technique available to win their point or defend their position.

Competing can be beneficial when quick, decisive action is vital, as in emergencies. It is also useful when unpopular actions, such as discipline or cost cutting, must be implemented. Finally, competing is sometimes necessary to protect against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior. If you are too competitive, however, you may find yourself surrounded by yes-people who have learned that it is unwise to disagree with you, which cuts you off from sources of important information.

**Accommodating** – Accommodating is the opposite of competing. It consists of unassertive and cooperative behavior. Accommodating people frequently neglect their own concerns to satisfy the needs of others in order to maintain a positive relationship.

Accommodating is an appropriate strategy when the issue at stake is much more important to the other person. Satisfying another's needs as a goodwill gesture will help maintain a cooperative relationship, building up social credits for use in later conflicts. Accommodating is also appropriate when someone wishes others to learn from their own mistakes. Too much accommodating, however, can deprive others of your personal contributions and viewpoint.

**Avoiding** – Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative behavior. People with this conflict management style pursue neither their own concerns nor those of others. To avoid conflict altogether, a person might diplomatically sidestep an issue, postpone it, or withdraw from the threatening situation.

Avoiding is appropriate when the issue involved is relatively unimportant to you or you have little power in the situation. Avoidance may be wise if the potential for damage (let people cool off in order to bring tensions down to a reasonable level). You should not let decision be made by default or spend a lot of energy avoiding issues that eventually must be confronted.

**Collaborating** – Collaborating is the opposite of avoiding; it consists of both assertive and cooperative behavior. It involves working with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies both parties. This is a joint problem-solving mode involving communication and creativity on the part of each party to find a mutually beneficial solution.

Collaborating is a necessity when the concerns of both parties are too important to be compromised. Collaborating merges the insights of people with different perspectives. This takes a great amount of time and energy. Trivial problems often do not require optimal solutions, and not all personal differences need to be worked through. It also does little good to behave in a collaborative manner if others will not.

**Compromising** – Compromising falls somewhere between assertive and cooperative behaviors. The objective is to find a mutually acceptable middle ground that partially satisfies both parties. This expedient conflict management style splits the difference and makes concessions.

A compromise is appropriate when goals are moderately important but not worth the effort of collaboration or the possible disruption of competition. Compromise is also wise when a temporary settlement needs to be achieved quickly. Too much compromise can also create a cynical climate and you can lose sight of your principles, values, and long-term goals.