

WHEN SOMEONE ELSE'S CONFLICT BECOMES YOURS

How to handle team complaints and conflicting stories without becoming the messenger, the judge, or the next participant

A new dentist can be drawn into office conflict before understanding the history, the relationships, or the facts. This guide helps you remain approachable while refusing a role that does not belong to you.



INFORMATION CAN QUIETLY BECOME A POSITION

A team member may be venting, asking for help, warning you, or recruiting agreement. When you are new, you may not yet know which one is happening - and responding too quickly can place you inside a conflict you did not create.

You can listen without endorsing the story, carrying the message, or deciding who is right.

1

YOU ARE GIVEN ONE PERSON'S VERSION

The story may be sincere and still be incomplete, emotionally filtered, or missing important context.

2

YOU ARE ASKED TO CONFIRM THE CONCLUSION

Agreement can be requested indirectly through facial expressions, silence, or questions that already contain the answer.

3

YOU BECOME THE MESSENGER

Someone asks you to deliver a concern they are unwilling to communicate directly.

4

YOUR TITLE IS USED AS LEVERAGE

A team member may want the dentist's authority attached to an interpersonal disagreement.

5

A REAL CONCERN IS BURIED INSIDE GOSSIP

Clinical safety, patient care, harassment, discrimination, or serious misconduct should not be dismissed merely because the delivery was messy.

DOES THIS REQUIRE LISTENING, ACTION, OR REDIRECTION?

Not every complaint deserves the same response. First determine what kind of concern is actually being brought to you.

1

IS PATIENT CARE OR SAFETY INVOLVED?

A specific clinical, safety, ethical, or legal concern may require prompt action through the appropriate channel.

2

AM I RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS ISSUE?

Your role may require a decision, information, or follow-up - or the concern may belong with someone else.

3

HAVE THE PEOPLE INVOLVED SPOKEN DIRECTLY?

Do not automatically become the communication bridge between colleagues who can address each other.

4

WHAT FACTS CAN BE VERIFIED?

Separate observations, dates, words, records, and events from interpretations about motive or character.

The goal is not to avoid every uncomfortable conversation. It is to place the concern with the right person and the right level of urgency.

LISTEN WITHOUT ACCEPTING THE ROLE

Stay calm and specific. You do not need to investigate every interpersonal complaint or shut down someone raising a legitimate concern.

WHEN YOU NEED THE PURPOSE

What are you asking me to do with this information?

WHEN DIRECT COMMUNICATION IS APPROPRIATE

Have you discussed this directly with ___?

WHEN YOU SHOULD NOT CARRY THE MESSAGE

I do not want to speak for you or relay this inaccurately. This needs to come from you.

WHEN FACTS ARE MISSING

Tell me specifically what happened, when it happened, and what concern it created.

WHEN CARE OR SAFETY MAY BE INVOLVED

If this affects patient care or safety, let us identify what needs to be addressed and through which channel.

DO NOT BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SHARED ENEMIES

Being included in private criticism can feel like trust. Sometimes it is simply the fastest way to inherit somebody else's conflict.

1

SLOW YOUR REACTION

You do not need to agree, defend, confront, or solve the issue before you understand it.

2

KEEP YOUR WORDS PORTABLE

Speak as though your response could be repeated accurately to everyone involved.

3

REDIRECT OWNERSHIP

Encourage direct communication or place the issue with the person responsible for addressing it.

4

ESCALATE THE RIGHT CONCERNS

Do not use neutrality to ignore patient safety, unlawful conduct, harassment, or serious professional risk.

You can be warm, available, and attentive without becoming the office messenger or judge. Listen carefully, locate responsibility, and keep the concern where it can actually be resolved.

A short guide can give you language and a place to start. It cannot see your schedule, hear your conversations, or weigh the trade-offs in your position. Without context, even good advice stays generic.

For a deeper dive, explore the New DDS Unfiltered Digital Library or work directly with Dr. K.

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Professional note: This guide is for general education and workplace communication reflection. It does not replace individualized employment, legal, regulatory, safety, harassment, or human-resources guidance.