

CONFLICT AND DIFFICULTIES

DURING THE ANNUAL EMPLOYEE REVIEW



Conflict-related or unexpected issues that present a challenge can arise during annual employee reviews. The purpose of this guide is to give you a few hints on how to successfully handle difficult situations such as these. Under „Contact Persons” on the homepage, you’ll find a list of contact persons you can involve in difficult situations: www.uni-goettingen.de/jahresgespraeche

A CONFLICT: WHAT TO DO...

- **If you are aware of conflicts / difficult topics in advance:** Make arrangements to have a separate conflict discussion or consultation independent of the employee review
- **When conflicts or difficulties arise during a review:** First try to diffuse the situation applying the principles of a “one-on-one discussion”; consider all positions and interests, develop joint solution options. Goal: To provide a constructive, open forum; not to avoid difficult issues, but to reach a mutually acceptable solution
- **If this goal cannot be achieved because the conflict proves to be unsolvable at the present time:** Break off the conversation; agree on a future date for an additional meeting with the involvement of a neutral third person or the next higher superior.

HOW SHOULD YOU ACT?

- **Separate the „person“ from the „problem“:** Stay objective; address statements directly to the problem, not the person.
Example:
„Communication with your colleagues has led to a few misunderstandings. What would be most expedient to find common ground?” instead of “Your communication skills are inadequate and this has caused problems when working with colleagues.”
- **Personal appreciation and confidence building** (e.g. call attention to the employee’s past achievements).
- **Focus on the future, not on the past.** Problem-solving should come from both sides (both the employee and the supervisor).
- **Show understanding and empathy;** however, don’t shy away from openly and honestly expressing opinions.
- **Do not allow yourself to be provoked,** remain objective, do not tolerate insults.
- **Listen actively, accept displays of emotion.** If necessary, wait until the employee has calmed down before continuing with the conversation.
- **When addressing addiction, sexual harassment or bullying:** Draw attention to counselling possibilities, offer the opportunity to have another conversation.



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HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND WHEN...

- **Your conversation partner breaks out in tears:**
Don't panic! Offer her/him a handkerchief. Wait until the employee has calmed down a bit and ask what caused the outburst of emotion.
- **You find yourself in a dispute situation with your conversation partner:**
Try to remain objective and suggest breaking off the conversation and continuing at a later date. Both parties should think about the conflict and consider getting a third person involved in the next meeting.
- **Your conversation partner becomes demanding:**
Stay calm and matter-of-fact, explain to her/him that you need time to consider the situation. Do not make any promises that you cannot keep.
- **Your conversation partner becomes offensive:**
Avoid insults and show your conversation partner that you will not tolerate any offensive remarks. If the insults get out of hand, break off the conversation and continue at a later date with a third party.
- **Your conversation partner has bad things to say about colleagues or attempts to involve you in a conflict between colleagues or attempts to involve you in a conflict between colleagues:**
Do not take a stance or express any opinion regarding a conflict or any person involved! If necessary, arrange a talk involving all parties.

