I had a staff of 10 who were really hard-working and really talented and they were really different people- their working styles, their communication styles, and mostly their personalities.

When we were able to work together, it was amazing because everybody brought their own unique perspectives and thoughts and ideas.

When we weren't able to work together effectively, it was a disaster because everybody brought their own perspectives and thoughts and ideas.

There were two staff in particular who just could not get along. From their perspective, the other person was completely to blame which is how conflicts tend to go, but from my perspective on the outside looking in, neither one of them was really doing anything wrong. They just were very different people with different communication styles and working styles and mostly personalities.

As the tension started to rise, I acknowledged it and addressed it and told these two staff that they needed to find a way to work it out.

I didn't think at that point in time that I needed to insert myself any more than that.

They assured me they would work it out.

But they weren't able to work it out, so we met again and they told me that they didn't think that would ever be able to see eye to eye but that they agreed to be respectful to one another and not have the conflict get any worse.

That was the best we could do at the time. Not every solution is an ideal one, but that's the best we could do.

But it didn't work. The conflict did end up getting worse and eventually it started to affect the rest of the team. As the team leader, I knew that I had to intervene before things got even worse than that.

For you as a team leader, when conflict starts to arise on your team- it almost certainly will- you need to make a very thoughtful decision about if you're going to intervene and if you *are* going to intervene when and how.

One of the ways you might consider intervening is by mediating. Mediating matters because- you're going to see this 85% statistic a lot.

When conflict happens on your team, even if it starts out as conflict just between two people, in many cases it starts to affect the rest of the team.

In some cases, in many cases, if you don't end up intervening, it's just going to continue to get worse and worse.

Have you had experiences in the past when your team has had conflict where you made the decision to intervene and it went well? Or maybe it didn't go well? Or maybe you decided not to intervene and that went well? Or that didn't go well? What has been your experience with conflict on your team?

What has been challenging for you about that?

When it comes to your mindset, how might you shift it to better serve you?

When should you mediate?

It depends, like every other question we've asked.

Here are some things to consider:

Have they had a chance to resolve it on their own? That's really step one.

In almost all cases, you want to start there. You want to give them the opportunity to work it out amongst themselves.

Sometimes they'll be able to and sometimes they won't.

Is it affecting their work?

In an ideal work environment, everybody loves each other and gets along and they really love working together. In reality that is almost never going to happen.

Sometimes the best we can do is learn to work together peacefully and respectfully. We might not ever learn to love it or love working with that other person and that's okay.

The question you want to ask is not, *can I eliminate all conflict on my team* but rather *is it affecting their work? Is it affecting the rest of the team?*

That's a really important question for you to consider.

If you do decide that it's affecting the rest of your team and that an intervention needs to happen, then it's important to ask, are you the person to do it?

Now the reason for you to say no- there *are* some good reasons to say no, but you shouldn't say no just because you don't want to do it or just because you're uncomfortable doing it. That's not a good enough reason.

There are some other reasons where it would make sense for somebody else to do it, but not just because you don't want to or you're uncomfortable.

A couple things that are really important to consider in all conflict, but especially when we're talking about mediating is this concept of asymmetrical conflict. What that means

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is, in a lot of cases, the conflict is more one-sided or it's almost completely one-sided.

If somebody wants a mediation or they think that that's the best way to solve what's going on, the other person might not even be aware that it's a conflict or it might be asymmetrical in the sense that for one person, it's just a tiny little annoyance, but for the other person it's a really big deal.

It's important to understand where both people are starting from in terms of how the conflict is affecting them.

Another thing to consider is when you're trying to solve a conflict with members of your team, is mediating the best option or is it more like an arbitration where somebody comes in to decide who's right and who's wrong?

That is going to be an option in very limited cases, but it is an option on the table particularly if it's a case where one person is really clearly to blame and the other person is not.

In a lot of cases, in most cases mediating will be a viable option.

Some best practices for you.

If you are the mediator, meet individually beforehand and really get a sense of what's going on. Get an honest, complete, fleshed out answer from each person.

Get their agreement to mediate. And here's the little asterisk after the fact- sometimes they're not going to get that choice.

If you decide as the team leader that this is what needs to happen, then this is what needs to happen.

In other cases, it might be presented as an option, but you do have the right to present it as a little less than an option.

When you all sit down together, it's really going to be very similar to how you would facilitate your own conflict resolution, but you're doing it with two people, and you're not the referee. You're the person who's facilitating the process.

You want to set up with them what the expectations are- you might call them norms or ground rules, whatever vernacular you use at your job- and make sure they agree to what those expectations are. You want each of them to acknowledge the other person and what's going on and to have that mutual appreciation.

This is really, really important because generally when people are walking into a mediation they already are feeling kind of hot and they're really upset about something. It might be hard for them to come up with something that they appreciate but it really sets a positive tone for the meeting.

Then you give them space to share their grievances and let the other person know what's going on and where they're coming from.

Then you get to your common solution- hopefully- and then you talk about accountability.

You've agreed to move forward in this way.

How are you going to check that?

How are you going to make sure that that happens?

Make sure to document and based on your organization, share with who needs to know.

So, the most important question for you is, how will you determine when to mediate a conflict on your team?