

Clearing the air

Lesson description

In this lesson you will take part in a role-play meeting to find solutions to problems within a team at work. You will discuss problems and causes of conflict which exist in the work place. You will learn language for complaining, making suggestions and being diplomatic.

Aim

Complaining about others and finding solutions to conflict.

Language

- Techniques for making complaints diplomatically
- Useful complaining expressions

Task

The task in this lesson is to participate in a series of clearing the air meetings.

Materials

Handout

Audio 67.1

Photocopiable (role-cards for three role-plays in Task)


Suggested running order

Lead-in	Brief discussion of conflict in the workplace
Input	Listen to a clearing the air meeting and answer questions
Language focus	Useful expressions for complaining and techniques for complaining diplomatically with practice exercises
Task	Take part in a series of clearing the air role-play meetings

Lead-in

- 1 Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Check they understand 'to fall out'. At the feedback stage, check the meaning of 'clear the air' (to cause bad feelings to disappear by discussing problems/disagreements) and invite members of the class to share ideas and experiences on the other questions.

Input

- 1  67.1 Check students understand the meaning and role of a mediator before listening. Students then listen and answer questions 1–3.

1 *Bill complains that Clare badmouthed him, bullies people to get what she wants, is only interested in advancing her own career and takes the credit for other people's work.*

Clare complains that Bill is disorganised, unpunctual, insinuates he's lazy and thinks he's in the wrong job.

2 *Joanne suggests they get on with their jobs and act professionally which they both agree to, though Bill doesn't sound too convinced.*

3 *On the whole, Bill sounds more direct because he doesn't dress up what he says in the more diplomatic phrasing that Clare uses.*

- 2 Ask students to check answers in pairs then class feedback as necessary.

Language focus

- 1 Students match the expressions (1–8) with their definitions (a–h).

1 c

3 a

5 f

7 e

2 h

4 g

6 b

8 d

- 2 Ask students to work in pairs and fill in the gaps with one of the expressions from 1. Point out they may need to make changes to pronouns to fit the sentence.

1 *put it all behind me*

3 *talk nonsense*

5 *pull their weight*

2 *walks all over him*

4 *tell it like it is*

6 *clash of personalities*

- 3 Ask the students to look at the sentences and elicit what they are used for.

All these expressions are ways of making complaints.

Ask them which they think is most direct and least direct.

Sentence 4 perhaps sounds most direct and most clearly a complaint. Sentence 3 sounds least direct.

Ask them to look at how the sentences are formed. Structures used:

- *Sentence 4 uses the present continuous with always to describe an annoying habit.*
- *Sentence 1 uses a negative adjective but softens it with 'a little bit'.*
- *Sentence 2 negates the negative adjective 'lazy'.*
- *Sentence 3 negates a positive adjective in the superlative form.*

- 4 Ask students to work in pairs and reformulate the sentences using the structures from 3.

Various answers possible. Sample answers:

1 *She's always arriving late.*

2 *She's not always the most hard-working individual.*

3 *I'm not saying he's rude, but he should think about the way he speaks to people.*

4 *He can be a little bit noisy when he eats.*

5 *I'm not saying she's a bad communicator, but it's certainly an area for development.*

6 *It wasn't the most intelligent thing to do.*

Task

- 1 If possible, divide the class into groups of 3 (if not possible, have a group of four in which two students play the mediator role).

Tell the students that they are going to take part in three 'clearing the air' role-play meetings. In each role-play there will be two colleagues who don't see eye to eye and a mediator. Each will have a turn at being mediator.

Give out the role-cards from the photocopiable materials for role-play 1 and ask the students to read the information on them. The colleagues in conflict have two specific complaints on their card, but they need to think of extra complaints as well. While they are doing this, the mediator should plan for how he/she will conduct the meeting: how to open the meeting, what questions to ask, how to deal with aggression and rudeness, some ideas for how the colleagues can overcome their differences.

- 2 Once the participants have had enough time to prepare, begin the meetings. It is the mediator's job to try to find some kind of solution.

Repeat the process for role-plays 2 and 3, making sure the role of mediator is rotated.

- 3 Students then feed back to the rest of the class how they got on, if the dispute was resolved or not, who was the best mediator.

Review

Feedback on language and review learning objectives.

Audio script

67.1

B = Bill, C = Clare, J = Joanne

B Well, it all started when I went on holiday and Clare had to cover for me. When I came back, I heard she'd been bad-mouthing me while I was away, saying I was no good at my job and that everything was a mess. I don't think that's fair.

C That's just not true, Bill. But try to see it from my point of view. I just think we have very different working styles. At times he can be a little bit disorganised and he's not the most punctual person either.

B She's just saying all this to make problems and paint herself in a positive light. All she's interested in is advancing her own career and if that means walking all over other people, then that's what she'll do. No one in the office really likes her anyway. They're just scared of her; her nickname's the witch.

J Bill, let's not get personal.

B I'm just telling it like it is. She's always interfering and then taking the credit for other people's work.

J What's your response to that, Clare?

C OK, I know I'm not the easiest person to work with, but neither is Bill and all I want is the best for the business. People might not like me, but that's because I make them look bad. How can I put this ... some people don't really pull their weight. I'm not saying Bill's lazy, but maybe this job doesn't reveal Bill's strengths ...

B Oh, don't talk nonsense, Clare. Do you see what she's like, Joanne?

J Listen, everyone calm down a bit. I think what we're dealing with here is a clash of personalities. Perhaps the best thing would be to get on with your individual jobs for the time being and review things in a couple of weeks. I'm sure if we all adopt a professional approach we can put this behind us.

C OK, I'm more than happy to go along with that. Bill?

B Well, it doesn't look like we've got much choice ...