

Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

A STORY ABOUT CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS



I hear the argument before I see it. It hangs in the air like a sharp noise, even though no one is raising their voice. A whisper, like sand shifting between gears.

It's 6:20 a.m. The early shift is just starting to clamp the first parts. Machines are warming up, the smell of oil and metal dust is back, as if it hadn't gone away yesterday. Christmas is near, but there's no sign of it in the hall. It's end-of-year pressure here. And pressure makes everything thinner, including nerves.

Sven and Marco stand at the edge of Station 2. Both tall, both veterans, both strong. And for weeks now, they've been like two opposing poles. The conflict has escalated, bit by bit, in small sentences, glances, corrections. Until now, it's erupting right in the middle of their shift.

"If you change the procedure again without saying anything, you might as well do it alone," Sven hissed.

"I changed it because your method produces rejects," Marco hisses back.

"Maybe he's producing defective work because you always think you're the only one who thinks things through." "Maybe I wouldn't be if you dismissed every suggestion!" People around them look at their parts, pretending not to hear. Everyone knows the game: when two alpha personalities clash, everyone else falls silent to avoid being hit. They work in hiding.

My reflex is already set: quickly restore calm, speak to both of them individually, and mediate a solution. I used to do this often. It worked for a while – and pushed the conflict underground. There it festered.

I'm thinking of the coach from a leadership sparring session recently. She had asked me:

"Florian, do you want peace or clarification?"

I laughed then. Today I realize how serious it is.

I intervene. "Stop." My voice is clearer than I feel inside. "Please both come with me."

Sven snorts, Marco rolls his eyes. But they're following me. They're still following me. That's important.

In the meeting room, I don't sit at the head of the table. I sit between the two of them. I want to make it clear that I'm not taking sides. I'm holding the space for both of them – and for the team.

I allow a moment of silence. It's difficult for me. Silence feels like a loss of control when you're afraid someone is about to explode.

"I see you two have been at odds for weeks," I begin. "And I see it's taking a toll on the team. We need to sort this out now. Not later." Marco raises his eyebrows. "What's there to sort out? I'm just saying how things can run more smoothly." Sven pushes back his chair. "And I'm just saying we can't reinvent the wheel every day." "Okay," I say calmly. "Then let's get down to brass tacks. What's your shared goal at Station 2?" Sven, without hesitation: "Quality." Marco, just as quickly: "Throughput."

That's the crux of the matter. Two goals that belong together – but have become weapons.

"Both are true," I say. "And both belong to us. But right now you're using the goals against each other. And that's blinding you."

Sven tries to link arms. I raise my hand. "Wait a moment. I want to open up a different level." I look from one to the other. "What will happen if you continue like this?"

Sven grumbles: "Then nothing will work here anymore." Marco: "Then just find yourself another shift supervisor."

The sentence hangs in the air like a blow. I let it hang. Sometimes, the ability to handle conflict means not immediately smoothing over what hurts.

"Okay," I say after a moment. "Then let's do this constructively. Each of you will answer two questions:

What do you respect about the other person?

1. What exactly do you need so that you can work together?

1. They look at me as if I've forced them to do an embarrassing exercise. I endure their stare. That's my part.

Sven is breathing heavily. "Marco is fast. And he sees things that I sometimes overlook."

Marco rubs the back of his neck. "Sven has a good eye for detail. And he keeps people together."

A millimeter less tension in the room. Not much. But real.

"What do you need?" I ask Sven.

"Give me advance warning if he changes the procedures. Not just when I notice in the next part that everything is different."

"And you, Marco?"

"That Sven doesn't block everything just because it's new. Sometimes he pulls the brakes too early."

I repeat both sentences. "Understood. Both are valid."

We're going through specific situations. Not to assign blame, but to reveal patterns. I stop every time a label is used. "No character judgments. Observations."

After twenty minutes, we had the issues on the table that had previously only been circulating as banter around the hall. The team outside would be amazed at how trivial conflicts are when you unravel them.

We formulate three clear agreements:

Changes to the schedule are noted in the shift log before the shift begins, with a brief explanation.

A 15-minute weekly review: data instead of gut feeling. What improved quality? What improved throughput? Where is the trade-off?

If you disagree, escalate early – not on the gym floor.

I see them both internally assessing whether they can keep it up. Then Marco nods. Briefly. Sven a little more hesitantly, but he nods.

"And one more thing," I say. My voice is calm, but I feel its weight. "The belittling ends today. You are role models. If you clash, clash fairly. With respect. Anything else will be dealt with decisively."

Sven looks at me. "Okay."

Marco: „Okay.“

As we walk back into the hall, I can still feel the tension. Conflicts don't disappear just because you name them. But they've taken on a form. And form prevents them from poisoning the team.

During the break, Jule comes to me. "It's good that you didn't just make peace again," she says quietly.

I nod. "I understand that peace without resolution is just a pause before the next explosion." The ability to handle conflict isn't weak. It's the opposite of looking away.

Takeaway inspiration

Conflict resolution skills

Conflict resolution skills mean not smoothing over friction, but rather bringing it into a fair and constructive dialogue before it poisons the team. Addressing conflicts early, respectfully, and specifically protects both collaboration and performance.

If you sense a conflict brewing, bring it into a safe space early on—with the announcement: "We're going to resolve this fairly." The sooner you make conflicts visible, the less destructive they will become.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS FOR YOU

1. What conflict am I currently creating because I want harmony?
2. What fear prevents me from addressing him openly?
3. What specific clarification timeframe will I set for the next 7 days?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

Victoria Beckers

E-Mail: beckers@energie-durch-entwicklung.com

phone: +49 172 90 69 280

Energie durch Entwicklung GmbH

Hufeisen 13 | D-41352 Korschenbroich

www.energie-durch-entwicklung.com