Module 3: Application of conflict management in the private security industry

Chapter 1: The principles of conflict management to the role

Conflict and conflict management

Conflict is often defined as a serious difference between 2 or more opinions, principles or interests.

Conflict management is the practice of recognising and dealing with such conflict in a rational, balanced and effective way.



It is a fact that while working in the private security industry, you will come across conflict as you carry out your role. As a security staff member, you will often have to enforce rules and regulations, and sometimes you will have to control the behaviour of others. Unfortunately, this will occasionally result in conflict.

It is important, therefore, that all security operatives understand how conflict arises, how to recognise it and most importantly, how to deal with it.

Preventing or reducing conflict in the workplace will help to make your working life safer and easier.

Situations that can lead to conflict

When working across different sites or venues, there are a number of situations that can lead to conflict, for example:

- misunderstandings
- poor communication
- lack of planning
- unrealistic/unfair expectations
- attitudes
- frustration and stress
- substance and alcohol use

Policies and procedures relating to workplace violence

It is vital that both employers and employees understand the importance of the policies, guidance and procedures in place to help keep everyone safe at work. Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places a legal responsibility on employers to:

> ***'ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees'.***

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Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

This means that employers are required by law to do everything they reasonably can to help minimise or remove any risk to their employees, including violence towards their staff.

Employers must provide:

- policy statements
- risk assessments
- procedures detailing what to do in conflict situations
- procedures for checking and reviewing safety precautions
- appropriate training
- a safe environment
- safe working practices
- support for concerns about abuse and aggression
- support following violent incidents

Module 3: Application of conflict management in the private security industry

Chapter 1: The principles of conflict management to the role

Employees, including security operatives, also have responsibilities under the legislation. Section 7 of the Act says that an employee must:

> ***'Take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work.'***

Employees must:

- familiarise themselves with their organisation's policies and procedures
- set and promote for both staff and customers as to what behaviour is and is not acceptable
- follow those policies and procedures
- be aware of what might trigger a risk situation
- be prepared to gather, share and discuss information on risk situations
- attend appropriate training
- use risk assessment systems
- plan, with others, what to do in risk situations
- correctly report violent incidents in the workplace

It is best practice to report all incidents of violence in the workplace, whether it be a threat or verbal abuse.

Appropriate reporting helps to pick up trends or particular triggers for aggression in the workplace, which will allow employers to ensure that their policies and procedures are up to date and effective.

When incidents of actual violence occur, proper records may also be required for insurance and/or investigative purposes. How such incidents should be reported will be detailed in the organisation's policies and procedures relating to the workplace.

They will also help set the expectations for both staff and customers as to what behaviour is and is not acceptable and help reduce risk of litigation and harm to self and others.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides a definition of workplace violence. It defines it as:

> ***'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'.***



Module 3: Application of conflict management in the private security industry

Chapter 1: The principles of conflict management to the role

Using communication to manage conflict

The effective use of communication skills can greatly reduce the chances of conflict arising in the first place and can help you to deal with difficult situations when they occur.

As a security operative, you will need to make use of positive and constructive communication skills to enhance relations with the members of the public that you come into contact with every day. How you conduct yourself and how you communicate and interact with others will have a direct bearing on how others see you, both as an individual and your profession as a whole. Your interpersonal skills will need to be continuously developed so that they can be harnessed when necessary.

As a professional security operative, it is vital that you always act in a positive way, for example by being:

- **approachable**
- **positive and constructive**
- **professional**
- **calm**
- **clear**
- **polite**
- **smart**
- **helpful**
- **fair**
- **honest**

Communication skills are all to do with the effectiveness with which we communicate meaning, guidance and intention to others, and how we can influence behaviour.

As a security operative, each time that you deal with a customer or a member of the public, it is called an **encounter**. You need to be aware of the appropriate attitude to adopt when dealing with various types of people and should take care in how you speak to them in different situations.

Each encounter will demand and should achieve a reasonable response and should reach a conclusion that is satisfactory to all parties concerned. While we must accept that not all encounters will end happily, the correct and conscious use of effective communication skills should mean that incidents of conflict and aggression towards you are kept to a minimum. Always remember that the way we respond will in many cases trigger an equal response from the customer. The following tools will help you to gain an appropriate response from the customer or at least not inflame the situation further.



Chapter 1: The principles of conflict management to the role

'Preventing or reducing conflict in the workplace will go a long way towards making our working lives safer and easier'.

Stages of escalation

It is vital that as a security operative, you are able to recognise when a situation is escalating to a stage where a more assertive or even an evasive or physical response is required.

Incidents of aggression and violence do not just happen unexpectedly without warning.



Frustration leads to – the customer possibly appearing confused and questioning why they are not receiving the response they wanted from you. For example, if a venue operates a no trainer policy but the customer is wearing trainers that cost £250; the cost of the footwear means that the customer does not feel that they are trainers.



Anger leads to – the customer passing the stage of frustration and becoming angry with you for not complying with their wishes. When angry, customers tend to raise their voices and will often become more visibly tense. They may also start to use more vulgar or abusive language.



Aggression leads to – the use of insults that are more personal to you. The customer may try to invade your personal space, use finger-pointing or other forms of physical signals to try and intimidate you.



Violence leads to – the customer attempting to or actually physically assaulting you.

Different people have different physical and vocal indicators that suggest the emotions that they are currently feeling. Always monitor their body language and maintain your personal space to reduce the potential for physical contact.

Module 3: Application of conflict management in the private security industry

Chapter 1: The principles of conflict management to the role

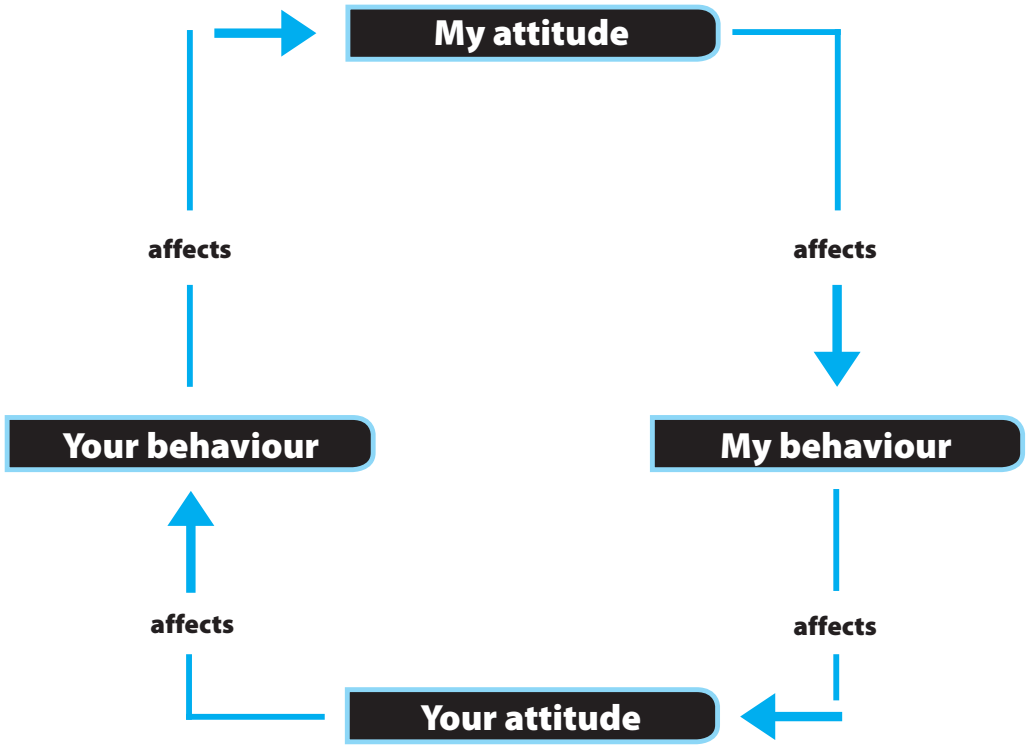
Attitude and behaviour cycle

People cannot see your attitude or know what you are thinking, but they can see your behaviour. Your attitude or what you are thinking is often reflected in your behaviour, e.g. your body language. That behaviour is seen by others, who will form an initial impression of you based on what they see in your behaviour.

Their attitude will then be reflected in their behaviour towards you, which in turn will affect what you think of them and how you decide to deal with them.

The Behavioural Cycle is a model that can work in a positive or negative cycle. It is important that the initial impression that we portray to the customers is positive as this will reduce the likelihood of conflict occurring.

'My' refers to the security operative and 'your' refers to the customer.



Conflict situations escalate in stages



Module 3: Application of conflict management in the private security industry

Chapter 1: The principles of conflict management to the role



When initially dealing with someone, you need to approach the encounter with a positive attitude, demonstrating positive behaviour. This should give the other person a good opinion of you and this should mean that they behave positively towards you in return.

It is important, therefore, that as a security operative, you always try to show that you have a positive attitude to a situation by displaying positive behaviour towards the other person.

Should you accidentally display a negative attitude or behaviour to the customer, the likelihood of a conflict situation arising will increase. The cycle may become negative and there could be potential for escalation. The cycle can be broken at the 'my behaviour' stage - you may not be feeling happy but you can make the choice to give the impression to others that you are.

Don't allow yourself to get angry – once you lose your temper you can no longer negotiate with the customer or manage the situation positively.

Manage the abuse – when someone is told they cannot have what they want, they will usually respond with the first potential insult that they can think of. This will usually be about you, personally, and may include what they consider to be a trigger for you, based on your physical attributes or gender e.g. 4 eyes for someone who wears glasses.

Maintain a positive attitude – to effectively manage conflict, you must like, or at least not hate your work role. Conflict situations are usually relatively brief and there are many more pleasant customers than there are unpleasant ones.

Be assertive – if the behaviour of a customer is unacceptable, then the customer must be told and appropriate action must be taken, for example by refusing entry or asking someone to leave. The customer must be in no doubt that the decision has been made and there is no further opportunity to negotiate. However, always remember that there is a big difference between assertive and aggressive behaviour.