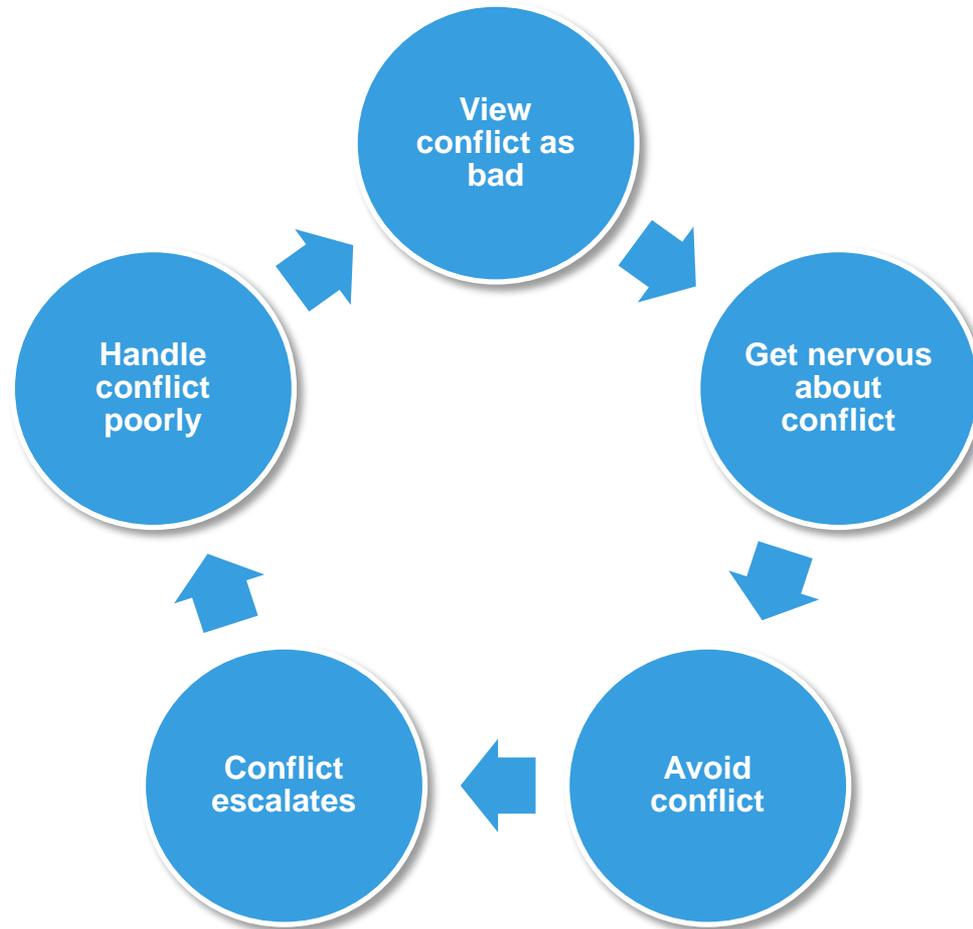


Conflict Avoidance Cycle

Managers fail to conduct constructive feedback discussions, because they avoid conflicts instead of managing them.



Source: Lulofts, Roxanne S., and Dudley D. Cahn, *Conflict: From Theory to Action*, Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

- Many managers find delivering feedback difficult, because it may lead to conflict, negative feelings, and negative experiences. However this affects your ability to manage and solve conflict. Professors Roxane Lulofs and Dudley Cahn have created a model that explains how our negative opinion of conflict hurts our ability to constructively solve the situation. According to this model, our belief that conflict is bad makes us nervous about the conflict we are experiencing. That nervousness causes us to avoid the conflict for as long as we possibly can. However, while we are avoiding the conflict, the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed. This causes the conflict to fester and escalate to the point where it must be confronted. When conflict is addressed in a reactive manner, we lose control over the situation and handle it poorly. The lack of resolution from a poorly settled conflict can yield new conflicts, and the cycle starts again.
- Have you ever found yourself reluctant to share feedback with a direct report, because you were afraid the employee would become upset or react poorly to the information? If so, you acted under the assumption that conflict is bad and leads only to negative outcomes. Your nervousness about this situation led you to avoid the conflict by withholding important feedback from the employee. Perhaps the team's performance began to suffer as a result of the employee's performance issue, at which point the conflict needed to be confronted. At this point, the conflict would be handled poorly because avoiding the conflict magnified the consequences of the employee's behavior. After this poor resolution, the employee may become upset that you did not mention the issue when you first noticed it, or feel that you were setting him or her up for failure.