

**Q.** I find I'm really uncomfortable telling others when they have said or done something that I find offensive or upsetting. I don't like confrontation and want to know how to handle these situations more effectively?

**A.** While most of us strive to get along with every one, conflict is inevitable. You have a right to let people know when their words or actions don't feel right to you. It takes guts to say the tuff stuff. Respectful workplaces start with you and your willingness to right a wrong, and I admire you for wanting to establish your boundaries. In order for difficult conversations to be effective, you need to communicate honestly and respectfully. Follow these guidelines to help you feel more confident and self-assured in your approach.

Be clear on what happened from your perspective so that you can clearly communicate how it has affected you. If you feel afraid, what's the fear about? What do you need in order to feel better about the situation? How do you want to be treated? What suggestions can you offer to avoid future difficulties? Showing emotion is a common concern for many of us. If you tend to get emotional, then put it out there – it paves the way for really honest conversation. Are there some skills you need to develop to help you resolve conflict? For example, how would effective negotiation skills support you? The Justice Institute of British Columbia offers courses through their Centre For Conflict Resolution: [www.jibc.bc.ca](http://www.jibc.bc.ca).

If it's a case of knowing your rights, seek help from your manager, human resources department or, consult with a legal professional. Stephen Hammond is a respectful workplace expert who is the author of *Managing Human Rights At Work*. His book offers practical tips for preventing human rights disasters. [www.stephenhammond.ca](http://www.stephenhammond.ca).