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Staying calm and cool at work, despite the economic pressures, improves your job security

Experts say there are techniques and language you can master to keep calm and sane in the face of stress, conflict and political back-stabbing at work.

Marcia Heroux Pounds

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There's one essential rule to follow in today's workplace: Keep your cool.

It's not always easy to do. Tension is rampant at many companies as they go through layoffs, mergers and other culture-changing events.

"Let's get rid of the hothead. We don't need more drama in this office right now," is a likely response when management is deciding who to cut in a layoff, said Barbara Pachter, author of *The Power of Positive Confrontation*.

Experts say there are techniques and language you can master to keep calm and sane in the face of stress, conflict and political back-stabbing at work.

Let it go. Often, it's best to let it go, Pachter said. "If somebody is an OK person, let them have a bad day. Tomorrow you may be having a bad day," she said.

Address it privately. Don't call out the person in front of other staff members, Pachter said. When alone with the individual, say, "I didn't want to say anything in front of anybody else, but"

Agree with the person. Indicate that you understand what your co-worker is saying and then turn it around. You might begin with, "I understand your frustration." Then, make a defusing statement such as "there may be some truth to that, and we are looking at it." Pachter said this also is an effective technique with your spouse or partner: "I did spend a lot of money, but it's important to have the house in good shape when your mother visits."

Ask for clarification. Ask your co-worker to help you understand what he or she is saying and why. This technique makes you less likely to appear wounded by the attack, and buys you time to calm down and collect your thoughts, Pachter said. "It stops the conversation cold, they can't argue with you anymore," she said.

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Postpone the discussion. If you find your temperature rising, put off talking about the issue. Say, "I'd like to talk about this, but I have a meeting to go to," Pachter said.

"When people are stressed it's real easy to dump on people. All your pent-up frustration comes out," she said.

Keep busy. Dr. Gaby Cora, a medical doctor and wellness coach in Miami, said it helps people through these trying times to keep busy at work and aim to do the best job. "People are being stretched even more than they thought possible," Dr. Cora said. But it's good to be super-busy right now. It shows your employer you want your job.

Work in the present. One way to control emotions is to focus on the facts. "We need to do A, B and C to finish this project," Dr. Cora said, for example. "Concentrate on the task at hand and avoid the personal part," she said.

Set goals. Help yourself feel more in control of a changing situation around you by setting personal goals for work. "Even a small project," Dr. Cora said. "This will give them a good sense of accomplishment and help avoid the uncertainty."

Be happy. Put a smile on your face and greet co-workers in a warm, friendly way. While everyone needs to vent once in a while, remember to acknowledge your co-workers as people, Pachter said.

"Complaining is draining," she said. Instead, take the attitude that "we're in this together. We'll get through this together."

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