

## **Case Study 1: Workplace dispute over an internal promotion**

**Type of dispute:** Workplace conflict due to promotion.

**Time from mediation to result:** Two half day sessions.

**Background:** Both Jessica and Alan have been working alongside one another for many years at the local newspaper. As their existing manager leaves the company, Alan is promoted, but still shares an office with the team, of which he used to be a member. Tensions arise when Alan decides to introduce a new policy, which makes little sense to the rest of the team and is likely to increase their already heavy workload.

**The challenge:** Alan and Jessica have been close friends and professional work colleagues for many years. For this reason the biggest challenge was to identify the “spark” that ignited the disagreement and decipher the most appropriate way of resolving the conflict, so that they could regain their previous friendship.

### **Objectives:**

- Allow each individual to express what is troubling them in a safe manner
- Find a common ground which they can both agree on
- Make a future agreement, rather than dwelling on the past
- Get them working together as a team again

### **Reason for conflict:**

**Jessica’s position:** Working at the newspaper for the longest period of time, Jessica has seen what initiatives worked well and what tended to cause problems. She was convinced that the new policy would fail, as well as increasing everybody’s individual workload. It was clear that the policy was set by senior management, but Jessica felt that Alan could have demonstrated a firmer opposition to the proposal, as he also believes it would make everybody’s working day more strenuous.

Jessica believes that as a person Alan lacks in confidence and has overcompensated for this by becoming overly strict with a couple of the team members, in an attempt to demonstrate that he is the boss. Aside to this Jessica, also believes that the team meetings are a waste of time, as Alan takes a while to get started and becomes distracted easily. This just adds to the mounting frustrations of the team.

**Alan’s position:** Having not done particularly well at school, Alan has found a job that he really enjoys and suits him. Surprised by the promotion that he receives, it boosted his confidence and he was looking forward to managing the colleagues that he previously worked with.

Due to this, Alan sees a split in the team dynamic. Half of the team continue to treat him in the same as they did before the promotion, which is difficult when

challenging the standard of work that is produced. The other half of the team distance themselves from Alan, and he gets the impression that they degrade his performance by saying negative things about him in secret. Jessica becomes more difficult to work with, and Alan thinks she is annoyed that she was not offered the promotion, as she is slightly more experienced and is a longer serving member of the newspaper. Jessica seems to want to sabotage Alan's attempts to become a successful manager, as she makes small remarks during team meetings, which undermines his authority.

**Why mediation?** As the two individuals were good friends before the promotion, it was felt that formal procedures may have caused further harm to the relationship. For this reason their line manager decided to pursue mediation as a genuine alternative and the results were extremely positive.

**Agreement and settlement:** After the individual and joint mediation sessions both individuals came to respect the other's opinions. Jessica realised that Alan was also opposed to the proposal, but was under managerial orders to implement it regardless. She also agreed that if there were problems in the future, she would talk them through with Alan before things got out of hand, and agreed not to make comments or degrade Alan in the presence of other team members.

Alan acknowledged that he was distracted during meetings and will undertake management courses in an attempt to develop his people management skills. Being a previous member of the team, Alan agreed to distance himself from them on a professional level, but support them as a manager.

Both went back to work without any further problems.

(Please note that the identities of the disputing individuals have been altered, due to the confidentiality element mediation carries.)