

SITUATIONS OF CONFLICT, INCIVILITY, VIOLENCE, OR HARASSMENT

Making a Distinction Between Facts and Perceptions

Facts are indisputable, unbiased, and verifiable information. For example, it is an observable fact that water boils at 100 °C. Verbal comments and gestures are observable facts.

Perceptions are ideas or understandings that we may have of something or a situation that are only somewhat accurate. Our perceptions are subjective because different individuals may have different interpretations of the same situation. As such, a number of people may disagree with the following statement: “It’s a beautiful day today.” For these people, it may be too hot out, too cold out, etc.

In situations of conflict, violence, or harassment at work, it is important to stick to the facts and not let our perceptions get in the way. By listing the various facts related to each of the events that occurred, we can objectively analyze the situation and see it more clearly.

Differentiating between facts and perceptions is not always easy, but it is an essential skill for shedding light on a situation and improving our relationships.

For each alleged event, take note of observable and verifiable facts:

- The location of the event
- The date and, if possible, the time
- Verbal comments, written comments (emails, etc.)
- Gestures and conduct
- Volume and tone of voice
- Facial expressions, the look in the person’s eyes
- Body movement and position
- Individuals present (witnesses)