

COACHING TIP

From Rex C. Houze

PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH PEOPLE PROBLEMS

Let people know the impact of their actions. Make sure the impact is relative to them, not you.

Avoid E-mail when dealing with people problems. You will lose the effectiveness of tone, inflection, facial expression, and body language; plus, your message or intent might be misinterpreted without the advantage of a dialogue. Try to deal with the issue face to face. If that isn't practical, do it by phone.

The severity of the problem might dictate the time needed, but in most cases be direct and keep it brief.

Avoid showing anger. It is okay to show or express disappointment; or, to explain the gravity of the situation with intensity; but, getting angry will create unnecessary tension that could shut down communication and cause resistance to change.

Get the team member to set a goal to correct the problem behavior. Set a follow-up date to review progress on the goal.

Resist the temptation to raise your voice. Keep it at a normal level or slightly lower. This will help keep emotions in check and encourage the team member to listen.

Describe your expectations for acceptable performance, behavior, or results in specific terms. Do not "sugar coat" or "beat around the bush." Get agreement or acknowledgement that the team member understands your expectations. Get the team member to tell you, in his or her own words, what your expectations are. A nod or passive approval is not enough when you are dealing with a serious problem.

Get agreement that the current behavior is not meeting expectations and is unacceptable.

Planning: Get the facts. Do not rely on rumor or innuendo.
 Know enough about the person to predict his or her responses.
 Write bullet points about what you will say in what order.
 Choose an appropriate location that is private.

ASAP – when you become aware of a problem and have the facts, the best time to act is as soon as possible. Waiting will not make the situation better and it probably won't go away. If the temperature gauge in your car enters the danger zone and a hissing noise is coming from under the hood, delaying attention will not be very pleasant. Likewise, delaying attention to problem behavior can be damaging to you and your entire team.

When challenged, the best strategy is to avoid over-reacting. Listen carefully and let the person vent. Venting to a good listener will usually make the other person more receptive to changing and taking corrective action.

Avoid offering your personal opinion; keep the discussion business-based.

When there are multiple issues, focus on one at a time to prevent overwhelming or confusing the team member.

Document the conversation. This will make it easier to follow up and reduce the possibility that something was misconstrued.

Be open to the possibility that this problem employee's behavior is a symptom of a larger problem within your team. Perhaps this person is in the wrong role; there are poor working conditions or a hostile working environment; or, there is a personality conflict with another team member.