



CONFRONTING PROBLEM BEHAVIOR – Part II

by Rex C. Houze

As promised in Coaching Tip #61 here are steps you can take to confront problem behavior (any behavior that gets in the way of achieving predetermined team and/or organizational goals).

Preparation Step:

- Approach problem behavior situations as soon as possible
- Gather the facts – be specific (what and when)
- Select an appropriate meeting place, e.g. private without distractions
- Have your goal for the session clearly defined; what type of discussion is appropriate?
 - o **Coaching** – an informal discussion to remind the employee what is expected of the employee and/or what his or her responsibilities are; your goal is to gain the employee's agreement to make a positive change.
 - o **Counseling** – a more formal approach where you are dealing with a major rule infraction or continuing problem.
 - o **Formal Discipline** – discipline could be a reprimand or loss of privileges for minor offenses, suspensions without pay for a more serious offense, or demotions or termination for severe behavior problems (theft, assault, etc.). Because of the legal risks involved with severe levels of formal discipline, it is advisable to seek legal or HR counsel and obtain necessary approvals first).

Step One: Define the ACTUAL behavior in specific terms. Focus on specific behaviors the employee can control. Avoid personal attacks. Avoid using inflammatory words such as *should*, *ought to*, *have to*, *always*, *never*, etc.

Step Two: Define the DESIRED behavior in specific terms. Point out the gap between the actual behavior and the desired behavior and ask the employee an open-ended question such as, *What happened?* Or, *What's going on?* Or, *Tell me about it.* Listen carefully without interrupting. Take notes of key points. When the employee finishes, ask questions to clarify or verify your understanding.

Step Three: Describe the negative IMPACT of the problem behavior; the way the team and/or the organization is affected – in specific terms. Be direct without being rude or otherwise offensive.

Step Four: State the CONSEQUENCES the employee will face if the problem behavior continues. Resist showing anger.

Step Five: Discuss possible SOLUTIONS. Help the employee develop a positive, corrective plan of action. As much as possible, have the employee arrive at possible solutions; this will put the ownership in the right place – with the employee. Get a commitment from the employee that he or she will follow through on the plan; include a follow-up date in the plan.

Step Six: DOCUMENT your discussion in detail and give a copy to the employee so he/she knows exactly what you are expecting in the way of appropriate behavior. Place a copy in his/her personnel file.

Step Seven: End on a POSITIVE note. Thank the employee for making a commitment to improve; express your confidence that the employee has the ability to correct the behavior and produce the desired results; thank the employee for his/her cooperation.

For a worksheet to help you prepare for and conduct effective sessions for confronting problem behavior, write to Rex at r.houze@sbcglobal.net or call 866-370-3509.