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MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

There is a good chance you may have a difficult conversation with a work colleague about their behaviour in the workplace.

Occasionally, people do behave inappropriately, sometimes without realising it. For example, offensive language, disrespectful behaviour, or demeaning comments may occur in workplaces as in any other life situation. Intimidation, threatening or harassing behaviour and workplace bullying may result in serious consequences for individuals and organisations. Bullying is a significant health and safety risk in the workplace.

When identifying inappropriate or harmful behaviour, line managers, the human resources area or the employee assistance program provider are able to give advice on the best ways to provide colleagues with feedback. The following steps may help in preparing for these difficult conversations.

SEVEN STEPS FOR UNDERTAKING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

1. Make an appointment with the worker or colleague stating that you have some feedback you would like to provide. Role model the behaviours you expect from the worker or colleague. Agree on a suitable time and find a private place to speak with the worker or colleague.
2. Sometimes, particularly as a manager, a difficult conversation is taking place because other workers have complained about the behaviour. Avoid amplifying the feedback or excusing your responsibility by stating that a number of others have complained. This may only heighten the embarrassment to the worker or colleague and inhibit their recovery.
3. Do not go straight into the feedback. Tell them you must provide them feedback that is difficult to share—set the scene. If you are feeling uncomfortable with your role, you might say that. Most people are as uncomfortable providing feedback about an individual's behaviour, as is the person receiving the feedback. This is a natural response.
4. The best feedback is straightforward and simple. Be specific and factual about the behaviour and provide examples, remain calm and avoid an accusatory approach, for example—"I am talking with you because [the behaviour] is an issue that we need to address...".
5. Look to the future. Emphasise the impact that changing their behaviour will have from a positive perspective. However, explain that doing nothing about the behaviour may have consequences for the worker.
6. Reach agreement on what the colleague will do to change their behaviour. Set a due date, even tomorrow if needed. As a manager, set a period for review. Record the exchanged agreement. Some parties like to sign an agreement; however, a record of events exchanged via email is usually sufficient. In other cases a record of events, a diary entry for example, is advisable.
7. Follow-up. Acknowledge the use of positive behaviour. Should old behaviours return, further clarification might be necessary. While considering that additional feedback may be necessary it may also be appropriate to consider that more formal action is the required next step.