

gender-based in nature. Second, the conduct must be unwelcome. Here's the catch; employees can "consent" to behavior that they don't necessarily "welcome", and it's a fairly low threshold to argue that the employee put up the intolerable behavior for fear of retaliation or out of peer pressure not to say anything. The key therefore, will lie in ridding your workplace of unnecessary exposure to these potentially lethal elements. Remember that harassing behavior can be physical, verbal, visual or auditory in nature.

The goal is not to rid the workplace of niceties like compliments and flatteries to the point where your managers are afraid of putting their socks on in the morning; instead, it is to sensitize workers as to how their behaviors and comments may be perceived. Because potentially harassing behavior is among the more serious of conduct infractions, it is often in the company's best interests to respond formally to claims in writing. Remember that with conduct, as opposed to performance related infractions, the company has a tremendous amount of discretion to accelerate through the progressive discipline process. In fact, a first offense may result in either immediate termination or a final written warning stating that, "if you ever again engage in behavior that could be construed as offensive, demeaning, hostile, or in any way makes a coworker feel diminished or less of a person, you will be immediately discharged for cause.

Substandard communication skills: Arguably the most important skill that workers need to excel in their careers lies in their communication abilities. Survey after survey finds that employees look to staffers' communication skills above all else to ensure that business progresses without undue interruption. Still, it's more than just how well someone speaks when spoken to when it comes to communication. More often, it has to do with a level of awareness or sensitivity in terms of feeding information up to management and keeping senior leaders in the know, lest they find out about surprises from individuals outside the group. There is even further issue of concern regarding communication abilities; the record being set by employees who engage in activities in a particular order, without regard to the

consequences of their actions. Gossips typically initiate unfounded rumors; rumormongers perpetuate them, even if they lack any foundation of truth or could potentially damage others' reputations or hurt their feelings.

Snitches—well, snitches are just snitches, and most of us know intuitively that playing the tattletale role is just plain wrong. These behavioral workplace factors occur around us all the time to differing degrees, but few things in the workplace do more to damage employee morale and trust than corporate “grapevine” that is allowed to go unaddressed and unchecked. People who initiate unfounded rumors and who gossip about their coworkers' or bosses' personal problems, work styles, or private challenges stir up drama for no good reason. They act like a worm in an apple, slowly coring away the goodwill and respect that creates camaraderie and trust. Left unaddressed and potentially unpunished, they could damage team spirit and goodwill more than just about anything else that the workplace could conjure up. Be direct, be open, and shy away from nothing when it comes to eradicating these insidious forces from the workplace. Your team will benefit, your subordinates will respect and appreciate you, and those wrongdoers will learn the errors of their ways before those same types of mistakes wreak havoc on their careers.

Surprisingly little has been written about effectively dealing with managerial style challenges at work because it's simply too difficult a topic to pin down. In reality, however, that more than anything ties into an individual's ability to manage his or her career successfully. How do you tell someone something as subjective and subtle as the following? (a) You appear to avoid confrontation at all costs, (b) you've developed a reputation as someone who has an argumentative and intimidating disposition, (c) you tend to over delegate and not do enough of the work yourself, or (d) you appear to instill fear in your subordinates.

These are strong accusations that more often than not will be met with stiff resistance. This creates another hurdle for you; fear of retaliation. Why? Because once you make someone aware that others may indeed think this way about them, they may become paranoid and initiate a witch hunt in the

form of a self-initiated internal investigation to determine who indeed made those comments to you for you to address them. Telling one of your supervisors that their management style is confrontational, bullying, over optimistic, wishy-washy, or anything in between creates lots of dialog that—let's face it—you'd rather avoid if at all possible. That's why so many of us practice the path of least resistance and avoid dealing with these subtle and subjective perceptions and indignities that occur day in and day out. How do you get someone to listen objectively to you when your message can be cutting? Well, don't expect it to be too easy, seeing that people are sometimes fickle and emotional toward anything that sounds to them like subjective criticism. Still, if you don't tell them about this perception problem that plagues them, they may never realize it's detrimental to their career until it's too late.

Arguably one of the most critical skills that any administrator/manager could have has to do with commenting on a subordinate's performance. Some administrator/managers are thoughtful, kind, and patient, while others yell, scream, and humiliate. Of course, it's up to you to determine what style you use to address the situation, and what works best for your company. However, a lot depends on your company's history and past practices. You may have a manager who runs roughshod over his staff members and delivers criticism with as much tact and diplomacy as a buzz saw, for example; ("you should know that", "I don't even understand why we're having this discussion") your goal is to help him tone down the angst and drama he uses with his staff members.

"The author, Paul Falcone says; that writing a book on how to manage people is like writing a book on how to raise kids; all parents have a different answer based on their kids' personalities, their family histories, and any number of other considerations. Therefore, it's up to you to determine what is appropriate and what will work under the circumstances you face from time to time in your company.

I want to say a little about corporate intention actions. Corporate actions include probationary terminations, administering written warnings, terminating employees for cause, and occasionally talking employees into leaving your company for your and their best interest. In short, it's where the rubber meets the road in terms of ultimate workplace confrontations, and it's where verbal skills and strategies will serve you best in terms of protecting yourself and your company from liability. If that sounds overly defensive, there's good reason. Inappropriate tactical approaches or the selection of the wrong word or phrase at the wrong time could have disastrous results in the litigation arena. It's important to look at this in an "offensive mode" as well, however. Positioning these conversations the right way and allowing employees to proceed with their respect and dignity intact is one of the most important roles you play as a supervisor. There's a lot of power that comes with the job of management, but a wise leader knows that it's not about power, it's about strength. And strength comes from self assuredness and selflessness, as when extending an olive branch at the time of administering a written warning or even termination. Most employers realize that they have a right to terminate new hires while in a probationary period, however, terminating an at-will probationary employee still carries legal risk, and you may want to occasionally provide some form of workplace due process, typically in the form of a written warning even to the new hires in their probation periods. It never hurts to provide a written warning as a cheap insurance policy should that individual choose to sue your company for wrongful probationary termination.

No fault actions are often the most difficult concept to explain to employees. After all, they're no one's fault. They are simply the result of doing business in an economy that sometimes appears to be based on survival of the fittest. In fact, it's arguably easier to terminate someone for "cause", than to lay them off. Why? Because with a termination for cause, the employee could at least see it coming and arguably had some ability to avoid the outcome. That's not the case with layoffs, where positions are eliminated, and the people occupying those positions are then let go—often

without much warning or notice. However, if you see yourself as a coach, consultant, facilitator, and networker who is willing to help your displaced worker, you may just lose some of that panic feeling that goes along with letting people go due to downsizings. Simply see yourself as their champion and initial support network. After all, it does eventually happen to almost all of us, and the goodwill that you spread at this point for others may very well come back to your aid at some point in your own career. You might want to provide them with copies of their performance reviews so that they could show them to prospective employers as a reference. Provide them with information regarding unemployment insurance coverage, benefits, continuation through COBRA, and then remain in touch with them if for no other reason than to listen to their issues and needs. With this help most workers can refocus on their future rather than bemoaning their past.

Terminations for first-time offenses are always challenging and while most supervisors assume that written warnings are the norms before terminating someone, not all offenses in the workplace are actually subject to progressive discipline. For example; if someone steals from your company, the organization has the right to terminate immediately, even for a first time offense. In fact, failure to do so could make your company appear irresponsible and set a dangerous precedent in terms of your ability to terminate future thieves. Employers have a significant amount of discretion to move to immediate dismissal for “conduct-related infractions”, like stealing, fraud, embezzlement, and gross insubordination. When it comes to performance-related transgressions, in comparison, employers are typically expected to go through all the normal steps of progressive discipline as accorded under company policy and practice.

Finally, note that “You’re Fired!” is not a nice way to end anyone’s employment as it deprives the person of respect and dignity. Although you may feel the employee has forfeited any right to respect and dignity by his or her egregious actions, keep in mind that firing people on the spot “a` la Donald Trump as in the Apprentice is best left for Hollywood. When you

suspect that a summary dismissal may be warranted, it's best to send the employee home with pay on an "administrative or investigatory", leave so that he or she is off the premises and you have the time to investigate your intended action more thoroughly.

Terminating the individual over the phone while he's at home can then take place, which provides you and your company with more safety while allowing feelings of anger and resentment to subside. You will make a much better record for the company if you place the individual on paid administrative leave before rushing to judgment, and courts and juries favor that type of corporate wisdom and restraint.



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