



Avoiding conflict in workplace discussions





Avoiding Conflict in Workplace Discussions

The way a manager communicates with their teams is key to success in their role, done well it fosters trust, confidence and dedication.

This topic has become a common talking point within our HR cases with a significant increase in grievances for the manner and tone in which their manager has spoken to them. The conduct of the manager may be warranted, but the manner in which that discussion or instruction is given can result in a demoralised and down trodden employee with little chance of them trusting their manager again.

Workplace cultures are becoming less tolerant of aggressive, loud and intimidating conduct, especially when it is targeted and in earshot of other members of a team.

Manager's Tone of Voice

One way in which the success of a manager is measured is through the tone of their voice. A manager's tone in the workplace can be a great asset when giving praise or support to a member of staff. If their tone of voice comes across as friendly and non-confrontational then they will be able to communicate respect and admiration. An aggressive approach will put people on the back foot, damage the trust and confidence they hold and lessen commitment and performance.

Employees would say they prefer and enjoy working for an upbeat and enthusiastic manager whose voice instils positivity. On the other hand, an ineffective managerial tone of voice can come across as either condescending or degrading. In order to communicate effectively with employees, a manager should ensure that their tone of voice aligns with the message they wish to send. Portray leadership, opposed to panic and hysteria.





There have been increasing cases where staff who are challenged about their performance, attendance or conduct are then citing the way they have been addressed as hostile, intimidating and unwanted. In other words, they feel they are being bullied at work.

This is leading to a rise in stress related absences, grievances and resignations. In a very challenging jobs market this is not something employers can readily afford; and constructive dismissal claims are on the rise.

Considerations for Managers

Managers must be allowed the autonomy to manage, but the manner in which they communicate with their teams can ultimately affect the outcome of the matter at hand.

While 'Crucial Conversations' may be a term of the past, the reality is that a manager who is aware of the facts and has considered the reasons for a challenging discussion will always be best prepared. Considerations that should be given include:

- The mental health and wellbeing of the employee they need to speak to
- Any ongoing or recent formalities that have caused resentment or dispute
- The likely reaction to the matters being discussed.





Tips for Managers

Here are a few tips you might consider, when a directive or difficult message needs to be relayed:

- ✓ Understand the mental health position of your team
- ✓ No need to go OTT, but prepare what you are going to say, particularly if it is not a positive message. Consider your tone of voice, language and body positioning. If the team are sat, then sit with them. Don't tower over them
- ✓ Managers usually get to that position because of their abilities to problem solve and deal with issues. Remember, most times people don't do things on purpose; there is often a reason for it
- ✓ Talk on their level, and use your similar experience to empathise
- ✓ Ask if there is anything they want to share
- ✓ Offer solutions to address, rectify or repair a situation
- ✓ Ask if they agree to what is being said and how it is to be addressed, then leave them to it
- ✓ Break the ice. Make sure everyone is alright, without dwelling on the difficult conversation you have had.

In taking some of these tips on board managers will be able to adapt their approach when speaking to their colleagues. They will accommodate different members of staff and take extra care with those who are experiencing a troubling time. All in all, the more effectively a manager communicates, the more willing and hardworking their workforce will become.

