



# Managing Behaviour

## What behaviour do I need to manage?

From time to time a team member may act in an unacceptable manner, or use unacceptable behaviour. A definition of unacceptable behaviour, is any action or series of actions that a manager finds unacceptable from their team, or the team find unacceptable from each other. To be more precise, some examples would include:

- Minor infringements of company rules that don't yet warrant formal action, such as occasional lateness
- Minor shortfalls of job performance that don't warrant formal action
- Socially unacceptable behaviour such as bullying

You can probably think of other examples, including those serious enough to be dealt with under gross misconduct within the disciplinary procedures. All of these would be covered by the various company policies and procedures; the purpose of this Top Tip is to help you take action before the incident or behaviour escalates to that level.

Unacceptable behaviour and conflict often arise as a direct result of a change in the working environment, or in something that directly affects it. This may be a change in the team, the working arrangements, the hours worked, or many other things. Before taking any action, it is worthwhile considering what might have caused it. For example, has a colleague's punctuality worsened since changing to an earlier start time?

## First steps

The first step in dealing with any incident, action, or behaviour, however minor, is to let the person know that their actions have been noticed. It may be that this will be all that's needed, so a quiet, informal word will suffice to nip the problem in the bud (see 'Top Tips' on *Giving & Receiving Feedback* and use the EEC model):

*'Fred, I've noticed on a couple of occasions this week you've been chewing whilst on the phone to customers. They can hear this at the other end of the phone and it gives them a bad image of us and the whole company, and a bad example to the rest of the team. I need you to refrain from this from now on.'*

It would also be a good idea to note this in your diary, as then if the action or behaviour is repeated or escalates, you have a note that this is not the first time.

It is useful to ask the person at this stage why the action or incident has occurred. If it appears to be a one-off, then the matter may be considered closed unless and until it is repeated. This is why managers should carry out Return to Work interviews with staff after a period of absence.

## Next steps

Dependant on what comes out of your first steps, you may need to take the matter further, and from here you may take one or more of several different routes.

## Reminder

If it is a trivial incident or behaviour, it may be appropriate to remind the person that you have spoken about the matter before, and that if it persists you will have no

option but to address the matter more formally. This is particularly useful where you could end up taking disciplinary action.

## **Empathy in discussion**

If it comes out in discussion that the person's occasional lateness is due not to laziness or disorganisation but to problems at home, you may think 'this is nothing to do with me'. However, a responsible and caring attitude would be to show empathy and even agree reasonable adjustments to the person's start time if this is possible, whilst continuing to monitor the situation and review it with the person as frequently as needed.

## **Training or re-training**

It may be that the person has failed to grasp some fundamental points of a product or procedure, and is therefore not putting them into practice. Rather than come down too heavily on them, they should be given the benefit of the doubt and encouraged to re-learn the topic. This would be a good response where there is an issue of capability, especially if you and the person both believe they can succeed once re-trained.

## **Disciplinary action**

If the problem persists, and especially if you believe that it is a problem of attitude ("won't do", not "can't do"), you may need to invoke the company disciplinary procedure. If this is the case speak first with your HR Business Partner.

## **Respect for People**

Certain types of unacceptable behaviour are listed under this company policy; discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimisation, etc. Many of these behaviours are also illegal. If necessary contact your HR Business Partner.

## **Taking action**

The important point in all this is to take action. If allowed to grow unchecked, the action or behaviour is likely to continue unchecked until it is too big for you to ignore, by which time the damage will likely have been done, the precedent set, and you will have to work many times as hard to recover the situation. It will also damage your reputation as a manager. In summary:

**Take the right action at the right level at the right time.**

**For related topics see Top Tips:**

- **Assertiveness**
- **Assessing**
- **Feedback**
- **PDR**