

Engage Employees



Topics:

- Fair and balanced feedback.
- Self-esteem and motivation.
- Skill is nil without will.
- Where does that buck stop?
- Ethics and motivation?
- Motivation. Inspiration.
- Sorry and motivation.
- Complaints and motivation.

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Fair and balanced feedback.

A Waste and Recycling Facility was using one of our Super Thinker® systems to improve a number of things on the site. We had two groups operating with about 9 people in each. The newish CEO was an enlightened, progressive thinker who had made a number of improvements to the performance of the facility and to the quality of the work-life of the employees. His Operations Manager was an 'hands on' type, who had been there many years and employed more of the 'old school' style of management. He was struggling a bit making the transition to a management style more consistent with modern times although he was very dedicated, hard-working, and very competent at most parts of his job. It was mainly his communication style that alienated people. As with most of us, this was unintentional.

I had noticed that the groups in which the Operations Manager participated had less constructive and productive discussion than the ones in which the CEO participated. People were not as forthcoming when the Operations Manager was present. This was having a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of his group.

The Operations Manager came in for a bit of flak which came to the attention of the CEO who passed on some of the criticisms. The Operations Manager was feeling a bit bruised and exasperated because, to his way of thinking, he had done nothing wrong. In an initial discussion I had with him, he was understandably defensive and refuted the criticisms.

We set up a meeting with the Operations Manager and representatives of the four operational areas of the facility – 5 people in total. While each person provided feedback to each other person, the real purpose of this meeting was to provide feedback to the Operations Manager on his style of communicating with his people.

A key concern of mine was to ensure that the feedback session was motivating for the Operations Manager, fair, balanced, two-way and focussed only on specific actions that a person could change or modify. It was important to establish a motivating climate. To do this, I discussed the following points at the start of this session:

- Issues or conflict between people can only be resolved by bringing them out into the open.
- Every person on this site believes, of themselves, that he/she does a good job.
- Each person can identify things that other people do which they wish they didn't.
- Not one of us is perfect. Each of us has personality characteristics that attract and repel other people. Each one of us has things we do well and things we could do better. Each one of us have assets and liabilities to our personality, to our style, to our approach to workplace relationships.
- Most people act in good faith according to how they perceive things and according to the demands and pressures on them. Most people on this site do not maliciously set out to make life harder for others.
- We are not going to like all the people we have to work with, but if we are smart we can work out ways to work with the strengths and weaknesses of others. Relationships are a two-way street – each person is responsible for his or her 50% of the relationship.

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- Most people find it easier to criticise others than to accept criticism of themselves.
- All of us on site have the right to be treated with dignity even if some things we do are not liked by others.
- People have differing levels of self-awareness – from the very aware to the very unaware. I can't change or modify anything about myself until I become aware of it and how it affects other people.
- Feedback that is unfair and unbalanced is likely to be demotivating and cause many people to become defensive.
- Acknowledgment is a powerful act in reconciling the differences between two parties at odds with each other. It takes a strong person to acknowledge that they may have got some things wrong in the past.

Discussing these issues before we started the feedback exchange seemed to help create a motivating process.

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Self-esteem and motivation

If you know anything that will make a brother's heart glad, run quick and tell it: and if it is something that will only cause a sigh, *bottle it up, bottle it up.*

Old Farmer's Almanac (1854)

No one can make you feel small without your consent.

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884-1962, American statesman and humanitarian *This Is My Story*

Those whom you can make like themselves better will, I promise you, like you very well.

Philip Dormer Stanhope, 1694-1773, English Secretary of State, *Letters of Lord Chesterfield to His Son*

People who have low levels of motivation may also suffer from low self-esteem.

Self-esteem is the opinion you have of yourself. It is based on your attitude to the following (www.more-selfesteem.com):

- Your value as a person
- The job you do
- Your achievements
- How you think others see you
- Your purpose in life
- Your place in the world
- Your potential for success
- Your strengths and weaknesses
- Your social status and how you relate to others
- Your independence or ability to stand on your own feet

If you have people working for you whose motivation, performance and relationships with others suffers because of low self-esteem, here are some guidelines to help you help those people develop better self-esteem:

- Engage in learning about self-esteem - what it is, how we use it, how we lose it, how we get it. Read books and attend seminars or courses which relate specifically to self-esteem.
- Discuss with your colleagues and friends the concept of self-esteem.
- Research issues related to the development and maintenance of self-esteem. (Use the resources of the world-wide web. Just key in self-esteem. For example have a look at www.more-selfesteem.com).
- Identify which staff members may need assistance with improving their self-esteem. Assess what the benefits will be to them, you, your work area and the organisation if their self-esteem can be improved.

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- Actively listen to these staff members to gauge their feelings about themselves and others through the attitudes which might be expressed.
- Offer, discreetly, to arrange help for staff members who are obviously having problems in this area. Do this by offering them articles to read, suggesting they take up leisure activities in areas you know they are interested in or good at, suggest books or videos which might touch on the topic.
- Plan tasks for the person which are success oriented.
- Plan activities which promote cooperation of all participants.
- Let the person know that you value them for who they are. Be specific about their strong points.
- Provide the opportunity for staff members with low self-esteem to assume leadership roles – with discrete support from you.
- Discuss with other staff members the impact that teasing has on those with low self-esteem.
- Discuss with staff members the importance of their co-operation.
- Recognise achievement towards desired behavioural outcomes by saying things like “That’s great so far, keep it going.” or “You’re almost there, well done” or “This is great so far. It will be fantastic when you finish”.
- Recognise genuine effort by acknowledging what they have done. Take extra time with these people to acknowledge their efforts even if the results aren’t quite there yet.
- Inform other management of your intended intervention strategies so that they can support your endeavours.

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Skill is nil without will

It is not the martinets that make an army work; it's the morale that the leaders put into the men that makes an army work.

Harry S. Truman 1884-1972, Thirty-third President of the United States.

Sadness diminishes or hinders a man's power of action.

Benedict Spinoza, 1632-1677, Dutch philosopher and oculist, Ethics.

Productivity is closely tied to morale, and morale is a reflection of how people see themselves. If you can improve your employees' perceptions of themselves, you can improve their morale - and thereby boost productivity.

Howard Hurst, President, Memphis Personnel Association, Personnel Journal, March 1986.

Unskilled fools quarrel with their tools.

Chinese proverb

The ingredients of morale are self-confidence, pride, self-image, passion for the cause, determination to succeed, motivation, support, zeal, willingness, contentment, recognition of achievement, celebration of success, etc.

A manager can do these things to improve staff morale:

- Identify the causes of low morale - ask staff.
- Allow team members to express their feelings about things upsetting them.
- Ask staff to suggest things we can do to improve morale.
- Discuss with senior management the causes of low morale.
- Seek input from all team members on decisions which affect their work.
- Take action with people in the team who are not carrying their load.
- Identify opportunities for team members to learn new skills from other team members.
- Distribute boring, routine work evenly throughout the team - share the load.
- Rotate jobs among team members.
- Discuss ways to make the work more creative, challenging and fun.
- Look for opportunities to provide recognition and feedback.
- Acknowledge 'right efforts' as much as 'right results'.
- Identify the expectations and perceptions of team members concerning the degree of recognition and feedback that they receive.
- Discuss ways to provide recognition and feedback.
- Involve team members in goal setting, planning and decision making.

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- Ask for people's opinions on things - people like to feel valued.
- Show team members that their opinion is valued by acting on their ideas and suggestions and giving them the credit.
- Involve team members in the 'big picture' and show how their work contributes to the welfare of themselves and their work mates.
- Delegate jobs to team members which give them new challenges and opportunities to develop.
- Allow team members who are doing boring, routine work opportunities to let off steam or express their boredom. Be more flexible in allowing opportunities to socialise.
- Hold regular meetings to discuss problems, needs and concerns of the team
- Allow a degree of flexibility and choice about how team members achieve their work objectives.
- Set targets and create competitions for team members related to work output.
- Celebrate successes and important events.
- Look for opportunities to provide support to team members who need it and then provide it.
- Encourage open communication by treating all perceptions as important.
- Recruit staff who have a positive attitude and are enthusiastic about their work.
- Look for people who can do, will do, and do do.

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Where does that buck stop?

Lack of clarity within a team about who is responsible and accountable for what is another reason why motivation can suffer. It's actually a common cause of stress, frustration and inefficiency, all of which affect motivation.

A responsibility and accountability grid is a very useful tool for clarifying the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of your work group or team. It is simple to construct and makes it much easier for the individuals to see who does what.

A manager can do this alone and then discuss it with the team or prepare it together with the team.

This is how to construct your 'role grid':

- Take a sheet of blank paper - size A3 or A4. Or use a spread-sheet or similar.
- Down the left hand side of the page (the long side), make a list of all the key activities or functions which are performed by the team. (Not the 6-9 key result areas, but the key activities related to each key result area. You could have between 20 to 50. The more you have, the more role clarification you will achieve.)
- The activities do not need to be listed in sequence.
- Try to keep your matrix to one page (which is why A3 may be better), but if necessary go to two.
- For each activity you have listed, draw a line right across the page.
- Write the initials of each team member including yourself across the top of the page from left to right.
- Draw a column for each person from top to bottom. You now have your blank matrix or grid.
- Leave a narrow space at the bottom of the page for the following code (or develop a code that better suits you):

Code

P- Performs action

C- is consulted for opinion

I- provides factual Information

O- is informed of Outcomes or progress

D- makes the Decision

X- not involved in any way

- Start with the first activity and consider the first team member listed across the top.
- Allocate a code letter or letters which best describe that person's role in relation to the activity and write the letter(s) in the empty box.
- For example, if that person's role is to actually carry out that activity then allocate a 'P'. If that person performs the task, is consulted for their opinion and is informed of the progress, then allocate 'PCO'.
- Repeat this process for each other team member for that activity.
- Repeat the entire process for each activity until each team member's role has been described.

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- Discuss the 'role matrix' with your team and issue a copy to each person.
- Review on a yearly basis or as the roles and functions of your team change.

Don't worry if the grid is not perfect. Its main purpose is to serve as a vehicle for exploration, discussion, clarification and agreement.

Team → Members																	
Key Activities																	
CODES	P	Performs Action															
	I	Provides Factual Information & / or Resources															
	C	Is Consulted Re Opinion															
	A	Is Advised of Action / Outcome															
	D	Makes Decision															
	X	Not Involved in Any Way															

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Ethics and motivation?

Honesty is the cornerstone of all success, without which confidence and ability to perform shall cease to exist.

Mary Kay Ash, CEO, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Vital Speeches of the Day, April 1, 1988.

Assuredly, the most gifted man errs who, in dealing with humanity, depends upon his own insight and intelligence and discards the moral law of society, created by respect for the individual.

Ferdinand Foch, 1851 – 1929, French military leader and teacher, Speech at Napoleon's tomb, May 5, 1921.

Moral good is a practical stimulus; it is no sooner seen than it inspires an impulse to practice.

Plutarch, c.46 – c.120, Greek biographer and philosopher, The Parallel Lives : Pericles.

Deterioration of a government begins almost always by the decay of its principles.

Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, 1689 – 1755, French lawyer, writer and philosopher, The Spirit of the Laws.

What the hell do ethics have to do with motivation? Read on. You'll see the connection.

It's an interesting insight into the evolution of the human species. As we plunge into the 21st century, the teaching of ethics has come into prominence. Why is this so?

Are nations, governments, politicians, captains of industry, managers, et al acting less ethically than ever before? Has the constant focus on the gods of materialism and money and the self-focus of the 'me generation' left ethics behind?

I'm sure that many people would answer yes to these questions. But any reading of balanced and factual history will show you that humankind has been acting ethically and unethically since civilisation began. It is not a new phenomenon. Notwithstanding that some of the modern issues producing dilemmas of ethics are new and may be more complex than those facing previous generations. Probably, because of faster, more global and more accessible communication, we are more aware of unethical deeds than ever before.

As the population of the world increases, so do the number of people who act unethically. And it is these people who make the news – not the people who conduct themselves ethically.

So how does a manager act ethically? What is ethical behaviour for a manager in the workplace? (Here we are using the definition from the Collins English Dictionary: *in*

accordance with principles of conduct that are considered correct, esp. those of a given profession or group.)

Here are some ways to demonstrate ethics as a manager.

- Stand by your word. When you make a promise to staff – keep it. If you can't deliver on your promise due to changed circumstances – explain why.
- Acknowledge the achievements and ideas of staff as their own, not yours.
- Acknowledge when you are wrong and have made a mistake or a poor decision. Acknowledge it publicly, explain why and then explain how you will recover the situation or what you learned from the experience.

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- Be transparent with the way you arrive at decisions. Share your reasoning with others – unless it is counterproductive to do so.
- Show how you act in the interests of all by incorporating, as far as you can, the needs and wants of everybody in your workgroup.
- Treat all your people equally regarding opportunities for development.
- Explain why you may be forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Communicate honestly what you know and don't know about issues affecting your workgroup.
- Speak the truth, as far as you know it, about the reasons behind policies and decisions unpopular with staff. Explain that while you may not agree with it either, you will accept it and support it whilst you are still being paid by your employer.
- Show how you respect the opinions of others even when you disagree by acknowledging that they are entitled to that point of view.
- Let people know on what information you have formed your view. Invite them to give you additional information or different perspectives. If that changes your view, explain why. If it doesn't, explain why.
- Place a high value on the thoughts and feelings of your people. Don't deride them or judge them by labelling them with derogatory adjectives.
- Keep information told you in confidence to yourself.
- Act honestly with your own flaws and limitations. Admit them openly. "Look. This is not my strong point, but this is the best that I can do at the moment. I'm open to suggestions about better ways to do this."
- Model the behaviours you expect from your people.
- Seek the advice and ideas of your people and be seen to act on it. If you don't use their advice and ideas, explain your reasoning.
- Did you miss the connection? How motivating is it for you if your manager acts unethically?

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Motivation. Inspiration.

Do managers need to be inspiring? What does 'inspiring' look like? Can a quiet, unassuming, softly spoken person be an inspiration to others?

The answers to these questions are – yes, it definitely helps; nothing in particular; yes, absolutely.

People are inspired by deeds and words not by behavioural traits or physical characteristics of managers. Which is probably just as well because some of us are pretty uninspiring to look at.

You can look like an absolute goose and still be an inspiration to others. You can be the most charming and beautiful looking man or woman and inspire no one. Inspiration is not about looks, personality, vibes or charisma – just actions, what you do and say.

We are inspired by people who risk their life in a flaming, smoke filled house to rescue another human being, who scale terrifying mountains in freezing blizzards, who sail single-handedly across the oceans in mountainous seas, who leap into raging surf to save a drowning person, who capture our emotions with great works of art, writing or music, who push through intense pain barriers in a grueling marathon, who dedicate their lives to finding the cure for life-taking diseases, who sacrifice their own material well-being in the service of those less fortunate, who overcome huge upsets or major disabilities and get on with their life.

Now there is not a lot of call for that type of stuff in the office, so how does a manager inspire his or her people?

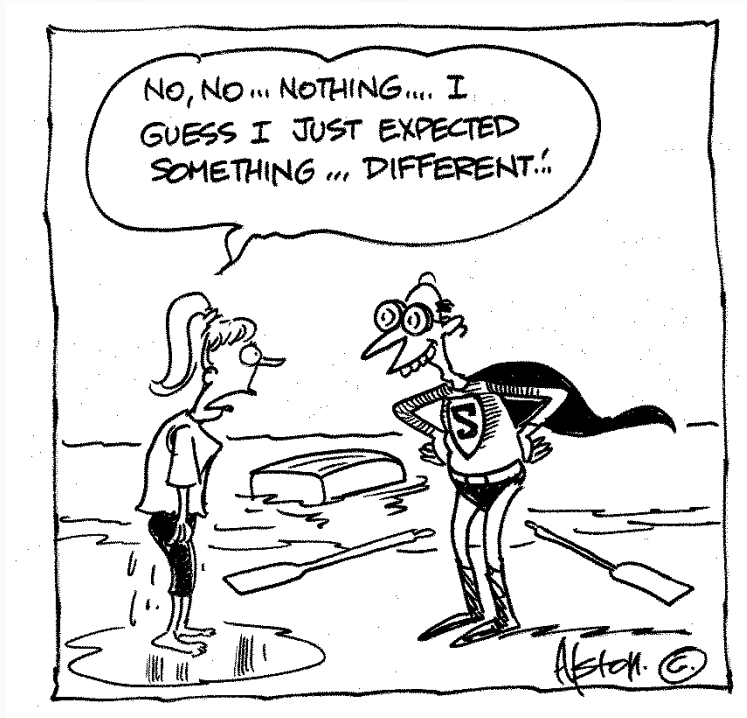
Here are some things you can do and say to inspire your people

- Let your people in on your thinking and reasoning. Be open about your thoughts and feelings. Speak truthfully and with balance. Explain your point of view – what information or experiences have formed your views.
- Seek the opinion of your staff and show how you have incorporated them into your actions.
- Acknowledge and thank people for the efforts they make even when the results aren't perfect yet.
- Seek feedback on your assets and liabilities as a manager. Acknowledge your strengths and your limitations.
- Admit it when you make a mistake and show how you recover by acknowledging the learnings for you.
- Challenge policies and procedures that appear irrelevant or outdated.
- Maintain the dignity of your people even when they get it wrong or act mischievously. Criticise the actions, but leave out derogatory, judgemental or demeaning comments. Stick with what you have observed, don't label it.
- Acknowledge everybody's contribution as the best they are capable of at that moment of their awareness.
- Be transparent with actions you take to improve the performance of your people. Explain why you are doing what you are doing.

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- Make sure people know the context, your expectations and are competent and then give them the space to experience, learn and grow.
- Deal with issues with the potential to disrupt as soon as you become aware of them.
- Show your willingness to learn and develop when things go wrong by adopting a learning attitude – “OK. Something’s happening here. What’s the opportunity presenting itself to us now. What is this telling us about ourselves? What can we take from this to move us forward?”



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Sorry and motivation

“I shall try to correct errors where shown to be errors, and I shall adopt new views as fast as they appear to be true views.”

Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865, Sixteenth President of the United States, Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862.

I once had the privilege to work with an Aboriginal from the Nyoongar tribe. He was a man full of wisdom and intelligence. He had a serenity about him that defied the way he had been treated by white society. He opened my eyes about what it is like to live in a black skin in a white man's world. He didn't talk about his experiences of blatant racism (though he had plenty), he talked about the subtle ways he was devalued, his dignity eroded. Yet he had no anger, no bitterness, no hatred.

He told me that he didn't want anybody to say sorry to him for the behaviour of white Australians to black Australians. He couldn't care less about sorry. What he did want was for the current generation to simply acknowledge that the past happened.

As with most of my compatriots, the truth about the way the indigenous people were treated by the British and then the subsequent generations of Australians was kept out of the sanitised history fed to me during my school days. It was many years later when I read a wider number of unabridged books on Australian history that I learned for the first time of the massacres that took place.

To add balance, while there are many substantiated examples of atrocious treatment of Aboriginals, there were many early Australians who treated them with respect and beneficence, even if many of them were unwittingly destroying the fabric of Aboriginal culture.

Acknowledgment is a powerful part of reconciliation. On a smaller stage, reconciliation is something that a manager may have to engage in from time to time. A manager can prevent a lot of potential damage by acknowledging to his or her workgroup when he or she has got it wrong.

A simple concept but it appears to be difficult to execute for many people. The main obstacle to acknowledging that you were wrong is possibly pride followed by a lack of awareness or acceptance. In an imperfect world, managers will invariably make mistakes.

In work relationships, acknowledgment is a powerful tool for mending broken bridges and maintaining motivation. It can take a variety of forms. Here are some examples:

- When I said so and so the other day during our project meeting – I was wrong. I would like to acknowledge to all of you that I made a mistake.
- Listen, Julianne. I would just like to acknowledge that I was a bit scratchy the other day. I think I was dumping some other frustration on you.
- When I was talking to you recently about this change, I was basing my comments on certain assumptions. I have since been informed of the facts about the situation. I would like to acknowledge to you that my original comments were ill informed.
- This may come as a shock to some of you. It's recently been brought to my attention that I don't give you much positive feedback and that from your point of view, it is always negative feedback. I just want to say that this has not been intentional on my part, but I acknowledge that's how it seems to you. I also acknowledge that I take all the many things that you do well for granted. It seems to me that I could let you know more often when you do things that I

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really appreciate.

- Yes. You are right. I did say that five minutes ago. I take it back. I was wrong.
- You know that argument we had yesterday? Well, in the heat of the moment I said some things that didn't come out the right way. They were not a true reflection of what I really think. I would just like to acknowledge that what I said was inappropriate and not accurate.
- I had a heart-to-heart chat with Senia the other day and she told me a few 'home truths' about myself. It seems that I have a few irritating habits that get up your nose. Well, I don't think I'm an orphan in that regard, but on reflection I can acknowledge that if someone treated me like that I would not like it. I don't think I can reinvent myself overnight, but at least I am aware of these things and I will endeavour to work on them. Is that fair?
- I think that in the past I have been a little too controlling in my management style. I acknowledge that this has frustrated some of you. I also acknowledge that you have the competence to take more control over the way you do things. I intend to back off in future and stay out of your way and let you get on with your business without interference from me.

Consider the impact on your motivation if this was your manager.

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Complaints and motivation

Kindness is greater than law.

Chinese proverb.

When it comes to people and their quirks, idiosyncrasies and personality flaws, the variety seems to be limitless. The manager's aim always remains the same: to keep these human beings from clogging up the workings of their group.

Andrew S Grove, CEO, Intel Corp., *One-on-one with Andy Grove*, (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1987)

When your own tooth aches, you know how to sympathise with one who has a tooth ache,

Chinese proverb.

As a manager, you will have to handle complaints from time to time. Sometimes you can take action which will resolve the complaint – at other times listening to the complaint is all you can do.

The important thing is that people feel that they can bring their **reasonable** complaints to you. Untreated complaints can fester and turn into bigger problems affecting motivation, so it is in your interests to welcome complaints as an opportunity to improve a situation before it gets out of hand. Under exploration and explanation, many complaints disappear because they were based on an inaccurate perception or an ignorance of the facts or of the broader context.

Things will happen in the workplace which will cause your people to complain. As time consuming as it may be, would you rather they bring their complaints to you or take them to others who may only inflame the situation?

You need to hear complaints to deal with them. Therefore it is important to establish a climate in which the person feels free to discuss the complaint without fear of repercussions or reprisals. To develop the right climate, you need to do two things:

- Listen with empathy even when you disagree.
- Maintain the other person's self-esteem. Allow them to 'save face'.

When a person complains, he or she wants you to hear what is unfair in their eyes. You need to respond (not react) in a way that indicates to the person that you can see what it is like for them in their world as they see it. Show that you understand both what the person is saying and how they are feeling.

A person's self-esteem is very important to them. The person may be calm or very agitated or very angry. Ignore the latter behaviour even if you don't like it and try to focus only on the complaint and that, rightly or wrongly, it is important to the person. No matter how trivial it may seem to you. Any response from you that trivialises the complaint tends to lower the person's self-esteem or embarrasses them or creates anger. Handling complaints successfully needs skill and patience on your part.

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Follow these guidelines always using your awareness of your unique circumstances to guide your approach.

- Listen to the person with your full attention showing your understanding and empathy by using paraphrasing and probing techniques.
- Get all the details – take notes. Let them speak without interrupting except to encourage them to speak and elaborate. Let them get it off their chest. This will make them feel much better and more open to reason.
- Show that you understand the situation by describing it to them in your own words. Empathise with how they might be feeling by describing how you would feel in a similar situation. Check that your interpretation of the situation is correct.
- Ask what they would like to see happen?
- Ask how that would affect all other people?
- Openly put your position. Provide them with information or perspectives that they may not be aware of. Explain to them the connections between things.
- Discuss what you can and cannot do and explain why.
- Decide and agree on specific follow up action. Agree what you will do and what they will do.
- Acknowledge the person's complaint and thank them for bringing it to your attention.
- If you feel after the discussion that there is no basis for the complaint and the person is just making mischief, explain your response, make a note to that affect, both of you sign it and invite them to take their complaint to a higher level with a copy of your response.