



## Topics:

- One bad apple...
- Nip it in the bud
- Say what?
- Choices and consequences
- Approach with caution
- Now listen here, old chap
- My way or the highway
- Horseplay (monkeyshines, that is)



## One bad apple...

Friendly counsel cuts off many foes.

William Shakespeare, 1564-1616. English dramatist and poet, King Henry IV

Reason and emotion are each the other's counsellor and complement....Whoever takes counsel of one of them only, and neglects the other, is thoughtlessly forfeiting a part of the aid that has been granted for our guidance.

Marquis de Vauvenargues. French soldier and moralist, Reflections and Maxims.

**If you have a person whose performance is unacceptable**, you will need to show leadership in dealing with it quickly.

Counselling a staff member whose job performance is unacceptable is an uncomfortable process for both the manager and the person. Which is probably the main reason many managers avoid doing it. Here is a process to follow which will make it easier on both of you. And help demonstrate your willingness to take the lead to resolve the problem.

### SETTING UP A MEETING

- Approach the person in private or out of earshot of others.
- Explain that you would like to meet with them to discuss their job performance.
- Explain that you will be doing this with other team members as well.
- Explain how you will prepare for this meeting and how you would like them to prepare for the meeting.
- Agree a specific time, date and place to meet in private.

### PREPARATION (By the manager)

- List some areas of performance in which you would like the person to improve.
- List specific things that you would like this person to do new or different and better in each area.
- List the areas in which the person is performing effectively.
- List specific examples of things that they have done effectively.

### PREPARATION (By the team member)

- List the aspects of their job which they think they do well.
- Cite a couple of examples in each aspect which demonstrates how effective they are.
- Identify aspects of their job which they think they could improve.
- Identify the specific things that they could do new or different or better in each aspect.
- Identify what other things would need to happen to enable them to make those improvements.



- Identify what training or coaching assistance they require to make the improvements.
- Identify what they would like the manager to do more of or less of to help them make the improvements.

## THE COUNSELLING SESSION

- Explain that this is an opportunity to improve the quality of work life for both of us.
- Say that all of us have different perceptions about various things that happen in the workplace and this is an opportunity for a frank and honest exchange of our perceptions.
- Explain how you will conduct this meeting - the format and your expectations.
- Discuss the areas of their job that they do effectively and the examples of specific things in each area.
- Ask them to discuss their view of the things that they do effectively.
- Reach agreement on the things that they do effectively.
- Discuss the areas in which you think they could improve and specify the things which you would like them to do new, different and better.
- Ask them for their view of what they could improve and the specific things they could do new or different and better.
- Agree a list of things for them to work on to show improvement.
- Discuss their view of the support they believe they need to make these improvements.
- Agree things which you (the manager) will do new or different and better to support their efforts.
- Agree what actions you will take to support them in the achievement of these improvements.
- Discuss your and their feelings about this session.
- Schedule a specific time, date and place to review how both of you have implemented your agreements.
- Thank them for their time and contribution.



## Nip it in the bud

Those who do not prevent crimes when they could, encourage them

Cato the Elder, 234 -149 BC, Roman soldier, statesman, and administrator.

**One of the least comfortable tasks a leader has to do** is to speak to an employee who is being disruptive, producing poor quality work or violating agreed guidelines for behaviour. Most managers do not enjoy this situation and, thus, many shirk it. But bear in mind that it is also highly uncomfortable for the wayward employee. In fact, you can use this discomfort to your advantage.

Simply put, people act to experience pleasant circumstances and act to avoid unpleasant circumstances. You need to make it very clear that both of you have to make certain choices and that each of those choices have consequences - pleasant and unpleasant. Make it clear that one consequence for the employee is that while they continue to misbehave you will continue to counsel them about it. As soon as they improve their behaviour, you will stop counselling them. It's their choice.

Inaction on your part will show you as a poor leader in the eyes of other staff. You will be seen as weak and ineffectual and your credibility will suffer. The longer you let it go the worse it will be. Make it easier on yourself by **preparing** yourself before you actually discuss the problem with the employee - it will really help your confidence.

### Answer these questions about the problem situation:

- With whom does it occur?
- When?
- While talking about what topic or while doing what job?
- Where does the situation occur or where could it recur?
- What specifically does the employee do or say or fail to do or say?
- What specifically do you do or say or fail to do or say?
- What are the consequences if the problem is not resolved?

Consider:

- (1) for you
- (2) for the employee
- (3) for the team
- (4) for the customers - both internal and external.

- What outcomes do you desire to resolve this situation?

Consider:

- (5) your needs
- (6) their needs
- (7) the teams' needs



(8) the customers' needs - both internal and external customers.

- What are the possible and probable consequences of speaking up for both of you?
- It will help you to actually write down what you will say to this person.

Complete whichever of these statements will work best for you:

When you..... When I..... When.....

I would prefer..... I want..... I need..... I would like .....

If you do..... If you do not..... If you will ..... Then I will .....

Invite the person to meet with you in private and tell them that there is a work issue that you need to discuss. Tell them it is something that you need to resolve, but that you can't resolve it without their co-operation. Suggest to them that you will go first and ask them not to interrupt until you have finished. Tell them that they will have their turn and that you will listen to them.

When you have both had your say, begin the process of negotiating an outcome acceptable to both of you. You need to discuss some of the consequences, needs and outcomes previously identified.



## Say what?

That man (is) far best who can conceive and carry out with foresight a wise counsel; next in order (is one) with the sense to value and heed such (wise) counsel; while he who can neither initiate it (counsel) nor avail himself of it when thrown in his way, is to all intents and purposes worthless and good for nothing.

Hesiod, eighth century BC, Greek poet *Works and Days*

**Okay. So you have a ‘problem’ employee and you have decided to exercise leadership and try to resolve the problem.** You’ve done your preparation (see ‘Nip It In The Bud’)

Now what do you actually say? Here are some questions and statements to consider. Remember that these are only guidelines and that you will need to adapt them to your situation.

- Here is a possible opening:

“John, there’s a situation happening here at work which I need your help on. I’d like to talk it over with you and see if we can find a solution.

I suggest that I’ll describe the situation as I see it and then I’ll get your view and then see if we can work something out. I ask you not to interrupt until I finish and I’ll do the same for you when it’s your turn. Is that fair?

I’m not here to give you or anybody else a hard time, but I am paid to try to manage this section. I don’t like having to do this anymore than you probably do, but this situation is affecting others and myself.”

- Now using the information from your preparation, describe the situation as you see it. Be specific.
- Describe the consequences of the problem as you see them for all the stakeholders, i.e. all the people who are being affected by this situation.

## Here are some other things you might say:

“John, I can only go by what I see or what I hear. But I may get it wrong. So, rather than jump to conclusions, I would rather talk it over with you and get your view.”

“How do you see the situation?”

“How do you feel about the situation as I see it?”

“How do you feel about the consequences as I see them?”

“Is there anything that I’m doing or not doing that is contributing to this situation?”

“Is there anything that others are doing or not doing that is contributing to this situation?”

“Are there things happening outside work which I don’t know about which are contributing to this situation?”

“What do you see as causing this situation?”

“What do you think needs to happen to resolve this?”



“These are the things, as I see them, that are causing the situation”

“How do you feel about my view? Am I being unfair?”

“What I think needs to happen is this....” (from your preparation, describe what you would like to happen in the future).

“Look, for the reasons I mentioned earlier I need you to:

- do less of this.....(describe the specific improvements)
- do more of this.....
- start doing this.....”

“What help do you want from me? What things do you want me to do to help resolve the problem?”

Agree some actions that both of you will take and set up a time next week to review the situation.

Thank John for his time and his contribution.





## Choices and consequences

As long as a man stands in his own way, everything seems to be in his way.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), American essayist and poet, Journals, 1909-1914, quoting Henry David Thoreau

Man is not the creature of circumstances. Circumstances are the creatures of men.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), English Prime Minister and novelist, *Vivian Grey*, 1826

**Some of your people will be underdeveloped** in relation to their level of maturity, life wisdom and awareness. As a leader, sometimes you will need to take a person aside and develop their understanding of how life works.

Let me remind you of Newton's Third Law of Motion again. You remember – every action has an equal and opposite reaction. This can be a useful notion to put into the minds of any recalcitrant people you may have in your workgroup. While you are at it, you might also introduce the notion of 'choices and consequences' as they are quite closely related.

It may surprise you but many people don't appear to hold these notions at the forefront of their consciousness as they travel through their work life. Many people appear not to have made the connection between the choices they make and the consequences they experience. Their problems, their frustration, their disappointments, their anger, their unmet wants, etc., are all the fault of somebody else, not them. It seems to me that the connection between choices and consequences and the implications of Newton's law are strong beliefs of more enlightened and developed people and that they appear central to their whole being.

If you are attempting to influence the behaviour of one of your people who is disrupting others or who is constantly presenting as a problem person, it may help to have a discussion with them around the choices they are making and the consequences they are experiencing.

**Here is an example of how you could lead this discussion with this person.**

This is only a part of the discussion. You will need to pre-empt this and follow it with other discussion. Obviously this is only presenting what you could say.

*"Mark. Let me just digress for a moment because I don't think we're really getting anywhere.*

*Look. I don't really enjoy these discussions any more than you do. In fact, I'd rather not have to have them.*

*Like it or not, it goes with the territory. It's a part of what I am paid to do. If you like, it's a consequence of my choice to take on the job of a manager.*

*That's what I would like to talk to you about. Your choices and your consequences. Whether you agree or disagree with me about why it's happening, one consequence we are both experiencing is the discomfort of conversations of this nature. I'm sure you've got better things to be doing than sitting here talking to me about your job performance. I know that I have. Would that be right?*

*I guess the situation for me is that every time you do something that is unacceptable, I'm going to choose to continue this consequence. I'm going to give you a hard time. Every time.*

# Execute Leadership



*Now I'd rather not do that. But you're part of the choice and you're part of the consequence. When you comply with the same requirements that the rest of us choose to comply with, then I'll back off and stay out of your face.*

*I'd like you to think about the things that have happened to you over the last 12 months. The things that pissed you off. The things that got you angry. I'd like you to think about the choices you made and the reasons you made those choices that contributed to those situations.*

*Day in and day out you, me, all of us, make choices about things we do and things we say. Every one of those choices produces some kind of consequence. If you don't like the consequences you are getting, change the choices you are making. You know that there is a saying – if you don't like the harvest that you are reaping then consider the seeds that you are sowing. It's all in your hands really. It's your choice*

*Think about this as well, Mark. Every action you take causes a reaction somewhere, sometime. If you don't like the reactions you are getting from me or others, you've got two choices. Change the reactions of the others or change your actions. Which is easiest? Which is within your control. Again, it's up to you. It's your choice."*



## Approach with caution

**When people talk about a leader who they rate highly**, the word ‘approachable’ is often used to describe him or her. What does being approachable mean? What does it look like to your people?

Whether other people see you as approachable is determined by how you respond to requests for information or context, to requests for the rationale behind a decision that you have made, to requests for help to solve problems, to people passing on undesirable news, to interruptions. It is determined by how you engage people in conversation, how welcome you make them feel, how important you make them feel, how you respond to challenges to your views on things, how you respond in times of stress (remember – anyone can hold the rudder when the sea is calm). In short, how you respond to people in their eyes determines whether you are approachable or not.

When someone approaches you about something think how you are looking to them. Avoid frowning or sighing heavily or ignoring them by making them wait. Turn to them, smile, stop what you are doing and give them your attention.

**Here are a number of different responses which send a clear signal about your approachability.**

### Helpful responses

- “Yes, Steve, I am busy right now. If it’s not urgent, can we talk about it in, say, an hour from now? I’ll call you when I’m free.”
- “Yes, Helen, I am busy right now, but if you think it’s important enough to bring it to my attention, it must be important. Come in, sit down, let’s talk.”
- “Hi Harry. How are things going? Gee... it’s a while since we’ve had a chat. Say... have you got time for a coffee. C’mon, I’ll shout you one and then we can catch up.”
- “Yeah, sure Julianne. Look I know it must look like a tough decision from where you sit. In fact, I don’t like it much either, but let me explain the context and I’ll think you’ll see that given the circumstances this is the best way to go. I don’t agree with it, but I accept the reasons for it so I am going to support it.”
- “George. Your face tells me that you don’t think too much of what I’ve just said. I’d like to hear your view and understand your reasons. Look if there’s a flaw in my thinking, I’d rather know than not know. Likewise, if I see a flaw in your thinking I’d like to discuss it with you. Is that fair?”
- “Hi Suzanne. Problem? No. That’s OK. As I’ve been telling all of you for some time now, I really see that my main role is to support what you are doing. If you have a problem and you can’t resolve it then it becomes my problem too. So make yourself comfortable and tell me the story.”



## Unhelpful responses

- “No, no, no. I’ve just got a million things to do. One more won’t make any difference will it?”
- “YOU DID WHAT? Aagh FOR CRYING OUT LOUD YOU IDIOT!”
- “Mary...That’s my decision. Now if you don’t like it, you’ll have to lump it. Anything else?”
- “Look, Mark. If all you are going to do is whinge then go and whinge to somebody who cares. I’ve told you what I think and that’s it. End of story.”
- “For heaven’s sake Suzanne, it must be bloody obvious even to you that I’m busy right now. (Big sigh) What’s the problem now?”
- OK Mike. I’ve listened to your story and I really don’t know what you expect me to do. You’ve created the problem. I mean that was a pretty dumb thing to do wasn’t it? I really don’t need this right now you know. I’ve got some really important stuff to deal with at the moment. Is this really the best way for you to spend your time? Just get on with it.”
- “What? When? Just what I bloody well need right now. Thanks for nothing. Yeah, leave it with me. DAMN!”



## Now listen here, old chap

Diligence is a great teacher.

Arabic Proverb

If you work in an environment where safety is paramount, strong leadership is required.

**WHEN IT COMES TO SAFETY**, it makes a lot of sense to employ a policy of ‘zero tolerance’. You might think that this is too extreme for your workplace. That may be true in a workplace where there are no or few hazards, where the likelihood of harm or damage is low, where the severity of harm or damage is low. But think it through. There are incidents of death or serious injury where the chance of this was one in a million. How will you go when explaining the death or injury to someone else when it becomes obvious that the cause was known and tolerated?

‘Sorry about that. We knew of this situation but we thought we would tolerate it.’

‘Well you win some and you lose some, don’t you? Ha, ha!’

Zero tolerance is a clear and simple policy to promote in the workplace. Set the leadership example yourself. Every time you see a hazardous situation or practice, speak up. Your people will soon get the message that you are very serious about safety.

One of the main reasons for a manager or team leader not to speak up when unsafe acts or non-compliance occurs is not knowing how to approach the conversation.

**Here is a simple framework you can apply when you observe an unsafe act or non-compliance with a safety procedure:**

- Attention. Get their attention safely. Wait until the moment is safe to distract them from what they are doing unless they are in immediate danger. ‘Steve. Excuse me for a moment. I would just like to get your opinion on what’s happening here.’
- Observation. Comment on what the person was doing safely and unsafely. ‘I can see that you’ve given some thought to doing this safely because you have got your boots and gloves on. That’s good. I see that you are not wearing your safety glasses. I’m concerned that you might cop an eye injury and do yourself some serious damage—maybe lose an eye.’
- Explore. ‘You’re an experienced worker, Steve. You know the drill. You must have a reason for not wearing the glasses. What do you say?’
- Agree the action. ‘When you are doing this particular job, what do you reckon the correct safety drill should be? Why do you reckon this is important?’
- Ask for a commitment. ‘Steve. Can you give me a personal guarantee that you will always wear your safety glasses when required in future? Is that fair?’
- Thank the person. ‘Thanks, Steve. I appreciate it. Sometimes it bugs me that I have to wear safety gear too, but I do it because I know that it is in everybody’s best interests. We go lax on one guy then others start doing it and then one day ... BANG! Someone is blinded for life.’





## My way or the highway

There is no wisdom like frankness.

Benjamin Disraeli, 1804-1881, English Prime Minister and novelist, Sybil.

**You are just about at the end of your tether.** You have tried every reasonable way to get this person, one of the 'difficult people' to comply with a particular practice, but to no avail.

However, you won't be beaten. You are going to give this 'dip' (difficult person) another opportunity to get with it. And you know that the best leader is one who can generate voluntary compliance.

This 5-step approach is adapted from the excellent and highly recommended book, "Verbal Judo – the gentle art of persuasion" by George J Thompson and Jerry B Jenkins (William Morrow and Company, New York). Dr George is a very interesting dude. He is a former college English literature professor, holds black belts in both judo and tae kwan do and, at age 35, became a rookie cop on the streets of Kansas. As George says, "Nowhere did I learn these principles more clearly than on the streets as a cop...".

Try this approach with 'difficult people'. Put yourself in their shoes first to see the world the way they see it. Do this to help decide your strategy using this model. As hard as it is to accept sometimes, in any given situation everybody does the best they can according to their operating beliefs at that moment. The problem being of course that some peoples' beliefs are limiting, unhelpful, under-developed, narrow, counter-productive, anti-social, etc.

You may use any or all of steps 1 to 4 depending on the situation and the responses you elicit before you move to step 5.

1. ASK (Ethical Appeal) and/or
2. SET CONTEXT (Reasonable Appeal) and/or
3. PRESENT OPTIONS (Personal Appeal) and/or
4. CONFIRM (Practical Appeal)
5. ACT (Determination of Appropriate Action)

### 1. ASK (Ethical Appeal)

- Speak calmly using a soft tone.
- Couch your words as a polite request.
- Describe specifically what it is that you are requesting the person to do.
- Use the word 'please'.

### 2. SET CONTEXT

- Make use of the power of 'why'.
- Explain why you are saying what you are saying.
- Give reasons, policy and procedures for what you are requesting.
- Show the connections between your request and the impact on others.



### 3. PRESENT OPTIONS

- Describe specifically the options available to both of you.
- Describe specifically the consequences related to each option.
- Paint a picture of your desired outcome from their perspective – describe how he or she benefits.
- Be clear that it is their choice.
- Allow them to save face.

### 4. CONFIRM

- This step confirms whether or not the person will co-operate.
- Ask, “Is there anything I can say or do at this time to earn your co-operation? I’d really like to think so.”

### 5. ACT

- Your choice of action will now be dictated by the level of co-operation.
- Be transparent with the way you arrive at decisions. Share your reasoning.



## Horseplay (Monkeyshines, that is)

It is better to bend than to break.

Aesop, c. 620 – c. 560 B.C., Greek fabulist, The Oak and the Reeds.

Humour is just another defence against the universe.

Mel Brooks, Comedian, writer and director, Rows, The Book of Quotes (Dutton, 1979).

(Burnout) is one of the greatest dangers facing us. If you lose your sense of humour and the ability to step back, you will go nuts.

Sam Missimer, Vice President, Clancy-Paul Associates, Computer and Software News, April 17, 1987.

Twenty five years ago, we had more intermittent stress. We had a chance to bounce back before we encountered another crisis. Today, we have chronic, unremitting stress.

Geneva Rowe, Psychotherapist, Newsweek, April 25, 1988”.

**Funny word ‘horseplay’ if you stop and think about it.** HORSEPLAY. Horses playing? A play about horses? A play for horses? A play starring horses?

Horseplay means rough, rowdy or boisterous play (Collins English Dictionary). Or, if you prefer, Roget’s International Thesaurus has buffoonery, buffoonism, clownery, harlequinade; clownishness, buffoonishness; foolery, tomfoolery; shenanigans, monkeyshines.

So my question is, “To what extent should a leader allow monkeyshines in the workplace?” Now I know that this is not a burning question in the minds of most managers and, if you’re still with me, you’re probably wondering where this is going. To tell you the truth, as I compose this very sentence I don’t know myself, but hang in there and we’ll see what happens. Have faith.

What degree of tolerance should a leader extend to horseplay in the workplace? None - zero tolerance - if personal injury, damage to property or equipment, violation of other people’s rights or loss of quality, service, productivity or efficiency is possible.

However, consider this view. People at work are subjected to various degrees of stress. At its worst, stress is a killer. Less dramatically, it affects people’s health, it affects relationships in and out of work, it contributes to poor decision making, it contributes to low motivation, it contributes to staff turnover, it contributes to inefficiency, waste, rework and errors and loss of productivity.

People need to be able to let off steam in the workplace. Laughter is the one of the best stress release responses available to we humans. (It may be available to animals as well – consider hyenas, monkeys and kookaburras as just a few that come to mind, and I reckon I’ve seen the odd dog grinning too – but it doesn’t appear to be as widespread).

Humour, especially when directed at oneself, can be a great way to diffuse a tense moment or to allow an avenue for stress to be released. A happy, unstressed workplace is usually a more productive workplace. Provided none of the above consequences are possible, it will probably pay a leader well to turn a blind eye to the odd bit of horseplay in the workplace.

# Execute Leadership



As the Readers Digest has told us for decades, and as was recently scientifically verified, humour is the best medicine. So next time you spot a bit of **harmless** horseplay show your human side and join in the fun. Respond rather than react. If the monkeyshines (what a neat word) transgresses the boundaries, put on your leader's hat and agree with your staff what is acceptable and what is not.