



TALKING THE WALK

CONVERSATIONS FOR ETHICS & COMPLIANCE TEAMS

Case Scenario

Case 5

HARD TRUTHS AND SOFT SKILLS

This meeting is a debacle, Kerri thinks to herself. *I'm trying to keep the project moving forward, but we're just going around in circles.*

Exasperated by their lack of progress, VP Leonard lays into Kerri about the project's lack of clear objectives, the team's stalled progress, and how he's done with her wasting his time with pointless meetings. He storms out, announcing that he won't meet again until Kerri's figured out how to do her @\$#! job. For a few moments, everyone is frozen in place, stunned and embarrassed.

Kerri manages to make it to the bathroom before breaking down. A few of her colleagues from the meeting come to check on her.

Eventually, Kerri feels composed enough to discuss the situation with CECO Tina. Tina encourages Kerri to raise the issue with Leonard directly; he's fairly new to the company and, while he has many strengths, his soft skills could use some work. It could be a teachable moment for him and he may respect her courage in confronting him.

A lot of Leonard's critique was accurate, so Kerri creates a plan to get things back on track. During what's left of the day and for much of her weekend, Kerri drafts and redrafts an email to Leonard. Finally, she takes a deep breath and sends her message:

I wanted to follow-up with you personally about the concerns you raised during our meeting on Friday morning.

First, I want to acknowledge that your frustration was warranted and your criticism was necessary and helpful. I am grateful for your feedback and respect you and the work you do. I appreciate your candor, and I'm working to address the issues you identified.

THE CHARACTERS

Kerri, a member of the E&C team managing a complex project that involves most of the department; reports to Leonard

Leonard, Kerri's supervisor; a highly-skilled new hire who manages most of the team and reports directly to the CECO, Tina

Tina, the CECO

TALKING THE WALK: Case 5 *continued*

In that spirit, it is imperative that I provide you with some critical feedback: While your observations were constructive, the way your message was conveyed was not. Your treatment of me was disrespectful, unprofessional, and unproductive.

I know that you work very hard and very long hours. I can see how a misuse of your time would be particularly upsetting. But you are a leader. A response that is rash and punitive should be beneath you.

Bluntness and cruelty may be viable motivators in some organizations. But not here. Respect, consideration, courtesy, and decency are far more effective in our culture than shouting loudly and bullying publicly. Any attempt at “efficiency” which involves circumventing the bounds of respect is counterproductive.

I deserve better than your recent treatment of me. And I have to hope that you’re better than the version of yourself you showed so much of the staff on Friday.

I think we need to have a follow-up conversation about this. It’s important you know how much your actions have disrupted my ability to work with you and my faith that you will treat me respectfully and professionally.

Leonard takes the email in stride and replies, saying he needs a little time so he can respond thoughtfully, which Kerri thinks is a good sign. Knowing that things are lingering, Kerri requests a postponement for their one-on-one about the project. Leonard responds in an instant:

Really, Kerri? I thought we were both professionals. We have a job to get done. I have thick skin, so I don’t mind you saying what was on your mind. Now that we’ve both said what we had to say, we have a job to do. Can’t you just get past this?

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Questions for Discussion

TALKING THE TALK

- What does Kerri do well? What should she have done differently?
- What does Leonard do well? What should he have done differently?
- At the end of the case, Leonard believes that everything is settled. What should Kerri do next?
- What action, if any, should Tina take to address everything that has happened?

WALKING THE WALK

1. Kerri realizes that she made the wrong decision in pushing ahead with the meeting when she and the team weren't ready. Do we routinely assess our efforts and feel comfortable changing direction when needed?
2. How well do we deal with frustrations and stalled projects?
3. When a project or meeting goes off-course or stalls, how good are we at acknowledging the problem? How should we best approach it?
4. Do we deal with conflict in a way that upholds and intentionally promotes our values? How can we ensure that our values are at the center of challenging conversations?

FROM THE ECI DATABANK

12% of employees who feel strongly that they cannot approach their manager with questions are engaged in their jobs. By comparison, **58%** of employees who feel strongly that they can approach their manager with questions are engaged in their jobs.¹



Many employees respond to workplace incivility by intentionally decreasing work effort (48 percent) and intentionally decreasing work quality (38 percent).



More than **three in five** workers (63 percent) lose time avoiding the offender.

Four in five (80 percent) lose work time worrying about the incident.²



According to ECI's 2018 Global Business Ethics Survey³, more than one in five workers (21 percent) **observed abusive behavior at work**. Abusive behavior is consistently one of the most common forms of misconduct observed by employees

1. Gallup. (2015). State of the American manager: Analytics and advice for leaders. Available for download at: <http://www.gallup.com/services/182138/state-american-manager.aspx>

2. Porath, C.L. and Pearons, C.M. (2010). The cost of bad behavior. *Organizational Dynamics*, 39(1), 64-71.

3. <http://ethics.org/gbes>