



Quality
Compliance
Systems



naphthens
solicitors

How to manage challenging conversations in your managerial roles



Jenny Heyes

Head of People Projects, Naphthens LLP

What is the role of a manager?

Historically, the key role of a manager was simply achieving the highest level of productivity from their team, and managers often used discipline to ensure that their teams would work to the best of their ability.

However, since then the role of a manager has evolved; decades of research has shown that when people feel psychologically fulfilled in their work, they tend to be healthier, happier, and much more productive.

Whilst a manager must still take responsibility for other factors such as organising and directing their teams; rather than take a 'disciplinarian' approach, managers should also take consideration to their team's physical and mental wellbeing by offering support and guidance.



Harvard Business Review on what creates a high performing team
<https://hbr.org/2021/10/5-things-high-performing-teams-do-differently>

People manager skills



It's essential for a people manager to possess the following traits/skills:

Good communication

Patience

Empathy

Humility

Positivity

Honesty



What might constitute as a challenging conversation?

In short, a challenging conversation is a discussion where you must manage emotions and information in a sensitive way to address a specific issue.

In a people management capacity, this could be to:

Address poor performance or conduct

Deal with personal problems

Manage complaints/ grievances

Comfort or reassure someone

Tackle personality clashes with peers

Why do managers fear these?



Many managers fear having challenging conversations because they often consist of; topics you don't want to talk about, situations where you're not sure what to say, conflicting opinions, circumstances where the outcome is uncertain or discussions which make you feel uncomfortable.

Why do managers fear these?



No matter how difficult a conversation is going to be, it is important that it's dealt with quickly and directly, otherwise the concern will only continue to grow and develop into a larger problem later. **Things to consider are:**

What outcome do I want from this situation?

- The most desirable outcome in any situation, is to ensure that your employee's feel mentally and physically supported to continue in their work in their best capacity.

Establish the facts

- Establish the cause of the problem

Consider the employee's perspective

- Often, an employee already has a desired outcome in their mind before approaching you, so ask them what they want the outcome to be, this will give you an insight into their mindset.

Consider the possible repercussions if no action was to be taken

- Will this lead to a lack of productivity?
- Is there a possibility of staff members leaving, in turn causing a higher staff turnover rate and damaging the company's brand?
- Will this create an unhappy workforce?

Consider any solutions you can propose to resolve the matter

- If they are overstretched, can their workload be decreased without affecting other members of the team?
- Could extra training in areas such as time management help them manage their workload?

How do you think the employee will react to your solutions?

- Will your decision stop them feeling this way?
- Will this problem occur again?

Challenging conversation scenarios and how to deal with these

When an employee says...

1

“I am feeling stressed / overworked”

A

Check the employee's workload and if it's similar their peers, then inform them that unfortunately this will not change as other people are managing the same amount of work with no problems.

B

Look at the employee's workload and take on some of their less desired work yourself.

C

Inform the employee that it's the nature of the business for the industry and that their workload cannot be changed.

D

Arrange a one to one with the employee to discuss what is making them feel this way to whether there is anything they think we can do to ease the situation

Challenging conversation scenarios and how to deal with these

When an employee says...

2

“I have had a positive covid test, I’m not coming in” (and you are suspicious of this)

A

As the employee is still in their probationary period you have the right to terminate their employment because of this.

B

You should tell the employee that you hope they feel better soon and to make contact when they feel better.

C

Ask the employee to provide proof of their positive test

D

Inform the employee that you have your suspicions of the legitimacy of their positive test

Challenging conversation scenarios and how to deal with these

When an employee says...

3

“I have a personal problem I need to deal with”

A

Ask the employee if there's anything we can do, or if there is anything they need in order to help them

B

Inform the employee that whilst you appreciate, they have personal circumstances going on at home, this should not be affecting their work and it cannot continue moving forward.

C

Inform the employee that as a people first business, you understand that personal circumstances can often affect work life and place them on compassionate leave to ensure work standard doesn't drop.

D

Inform the employee that you will allow them to continue working but if their standard of work does drop then you will have no other choice but to begin disciplinary proceedings.

Challenging conversation scenarios and how to deal with these

When an employee says...

4 “I don’t like working with X, I want to make a complaint”

A

Inform the employee that in they aren’t always going to get along with their peers and this is something that they will just have to put up with.

B

Change the shift pattern of the employee who has made the request to ensure that their paths don’t cross.

C

Establish the facts, find out on what grounds do they may wish to submit a grievance.

D

Arrange a mediation session between both employees so that they can settle their differences.

Challenging conversation scenarios and how to deal with these



When you think...

5

An employee's work is substandard

A

Consider taking disciplinary action, the employee knows what's required of them and is failing to meet the required standard.

B

Have an informal discussion with the employee to discuss the issues that you're having with the standard of their work, find out if there are any circumstances which are causing it to drop below the required standard.

C

Closely monitor the employee's work throughout the following month, if their standard of work continues to be below the required level, then issue a disciplinary.

D

Consider giving the employee a smaller caseload, this will likely give them more time to ensure their standard of work improves.

Challenging conversation scenarios and how to deal with these



6

There is a personal hygiene issue

A

Save the employee's feelings by giving subtle hints in the hope that the issue stops

B

Inform the employee that personal hygiene issues are unacceptable and invite them to a disciplinary meeting.

C

Change the employee's working pattern so the issues don't affect as many people

D

Have a private discussion with the employee to inform them of the problem, ensuring that you remain courteous and respectful of their feelings.

Common Pitfalls

Common pitfalls which managers make when dealing with challenging conversations are:

Having an emotional response to the situation

Not actually providing a solution to a problem

Common Pitfalls

Common pitfalls which managers make when dealing with challenging conversations are:

Delaying the conversation

Not displaying sensitivity

Common Pitfalls

Common pitfalls which managers make when dealing with challenging conversations are:

Being unprepared for the conversation



Any questions?



Jenny.Heyes@naphens.co.uk
01254 266415