

The Art of Constructive Criticism

HOW TO STATE YOUR CASE TO AN EMPLOYEE WITHOUT BEING PERSONAL

This weekend I was told by a person who was doing a service for me about a confrontation she had with her employer. While I usually discourage employees from discussing such things with customers, I gave her a willing ear because I'm in the business of Employer/Employee management.

The employee has been on the job a very short while (about a week) and has not found her footing yet. She is jovial, outgoing, and maybe "over-shares", but seems to be a very nice person with a lot of experience. She loves what she does, and JUST maybe takes a little too long at it. She does talk a lot, but often stops to say, "Am I talking too much? Just say so and I will stop!", and appears to mean it. And she works all the while. Not any faster or slower than anyone else has been. And perhaps the time constraints by this employer may be unreasonable. She made me feel comfortable and made me laugh often while I was there.

So as her story goes, she was called on the carpet because she cannot make her time count the way her employer feels it should. She was told that "tomorrow may be your last day" "I don't like the way you wear your hair, the way you dress, the way you walk, or the way you talk". She was belittled very severely not only about her failure to perform in the way that her employer wanted her to, but for personal things that, in some ways, she has no way of changing. All of this apparently was done within the earshot of others. She packed all her stuff and took it home with her and refused to answer her phone all night as others tried to call her. She did come back to work the next day, hurt but willing to try.

I didn't comment, I just let her talk, because I am there for a service and not as an advisor, but I would have liked to have advised her employer.

So, how could the employer have handled this situation properly?

First, it would have been more productive to have met with the employee when the employer was less angry. The employer should have said, "I need to meet with you tomorrow after your last appointment. Please plan to stay a little later." The meeting should have been private and not in the presence of multiple people. After all, this same employer hired her, touting her experience to her customers. So, what happened between the interview and the confrontation?

If the employee's attire does not meet dress code, you simply say, "I need you to try to wear more appropriate attire to work---a little more professional, please." Be specific as to what is and what is not acceptable.

If she is “over-sharing” and talking too much, you say, “Please refrain from talking the whole time you have a client. Being friendly is fine, but please do not share politics or family history, or private information about your past. We want to maintain a professional relationship with our clients.” Be sure that your handbook covers the “do’s and don’ts” for your company and your employees’ public persona.

Do not threaten that “tomorrow may be your last day” unless you are prepared to back it up. No one ever performed better under threats. Think of how you would feel carrying that around all night. Is it really what you want your employee to remember from that day?

It is never okay to tell an employee that you don’t like the way they walk. How do you change the way you walk? This particular person has a brain tumor and the employer risks a lawsuit for this over-the-top behavior. Unless your employees are galloping through the business and doing it loudly, you may want to rethink your dislike and the way you handle it.

There are acceptable ways to discipline an employee. Employers have to remember that these are adults who deserve respect, and they need to expect the same from their employees. Here are some steps to follow when disciplining an employee:

- Step 1: Have a cool head. Do not lash out at an employee. You may regret it and cannot take it back.
- Step 2: Set a specific time for your discussion, in private, and usually with an HR employee or manager present.
- Step 3: Have a written agenda. What are we going to discuss? What goals do we need to meet? What changes would you like to see?
- Step 4: Give a warning. If you are really planning on firing the employee, give warnings (usually 3) before actually firing him/her-----unless s/he is doing something that might endanger other employees or you. Then, request that the employee leave immediately and change locks or codes.
- Step 5: Write it up. Put it in the employee’s file and give him/her a copy. Be sure that what you write is not something you would hate to see up on the BIG WHITE WALL as my attorney used to say. Be specific but not “personal”.
- Step 6: Give the employee a time limit to change. Don’t be unreasonable, but set a specific time. Provide the employee with the appropriate resources to meet your expectations.
- Step 7: Encourage the employee. Being “mean” isn’t productive. No matter how irritated you are, give the employee the respect that you would want, and encourage him/her to do better. You may just have the best employee ever as a result!

For more information about Employer/Employee management, please contact us at the website below.

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