

Dealing with Angry Workers

It happens everywhere. People bring their personal conflicts to work with them. Managers and supervisors must deal with workers who might be angry about something else but decide to take it out on the leadership.

If a worker you supervise approaches you in a hostile way, there is immense temptation to take it personally and be hostile back. BUT... don't take the bait; be professional. Here are some tips to help you through these difficult situations:

1. **Remain calm and firm. Breathe.**
2. **Decide whether you wish to deal with this situation at this time.** To respond professionally to conflict requires you to keep your head. If you don't feel ready to deal with the conflict at the moment, excuse yourself from the situation. When you do that, you must **absolutely** make an appointment to discuss the situation at a future time—and keep that appointment.
3. **Resist judging, criticizing or talking down to the worker.** Instead, listen.
4. **Restate what you hear the worker saying.**
5. **Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements.** “I feel frustrated that we seem to be rehashing the same problem over and over.”
6. **Try to imagine how the other person is feeling and thinking.** This will allow you to communicate in a way that will appeal to his/her concerns. If you can appear to put yourself in their place, it might change the tone of the conversation.
7. **Think of win-win opportunities.** What can you both gain from working together through this conflict?
8. **Pay attention to the nonverbal messages of the other person.** What is in the tone of voice? What are the facial expressions? If you sense something else is wrong, ask about it in a very tentative way. This can get to the heart of the matter or can eliminate barriers to further communication.
9. **Be very clear in what you say and in what you ask.** When speaking, be specific; be clear. Do not take things for granted. Say what you will or will not do, and be direct. Establish agreements and clarify responsibilities. Get a commitment. Set limits so that conflict does not get out of hand.
10. **Ensure that you and the other person understand the agreements made and responsibilities defined.** In a respectful tone, you might even ask, “Now..., this is where I heard us agree. What did you hear?”
11. **Periodically check in with the worker to understand feelings on both sides.** Much can change in terms of perceptions and experiences during conflict discussions. “Are we still on the same page with this?”
12. **State and follow through with consequences.** If the workers angry behavior leads to problems, follow your procedures and make them aware of it. If job action or other consequences are called for, consult with HR. There is an old maxim that in the workplace, “if you allow it, it is approved of.” If you don't act, it will appear as if the company is winking at inappropriate aggression.

First Sun EAP has a dedicated Risk Management Team available to assist you with these issues. You can call any time for a free confidential consultation to discuss these or any workplace issues that affect the performance of your associates. Call toll free at **800-968-8143** or in Greater Columbia, **803-376-2668**.

For more information on this topic as well as other risk management situations, please see our website at: www.firstsuneap.com.