

the ADVISOR

RESOURCES FOR SUPERVISORS, MANAGERS, AND HUMAN RESOURCES PERSONNEL

Cooling a Heated Moment

Disagreements are a natural result when people with differing expertise and points of view come together to solve problems. When the stakes are high, tempers may flare, leading to a heated or difficult moment.

While it is impossible to predict what may trigger a tense moment, some situations that may make it more likely include:

- ▶ Personality conflicts
- ▶ Shock, surprise, or embarrassment
- ▶ Misunderstandings
- ▶ Ongoing or persistent stress
- ▶ Mistakes or errors
- ▶ Fear of change
- ▶ Uncertainty about the future

As a manager, it is important to have the ability to cool heated moments and ease your team back to a state of normalcy.

Try these tips for defusing tension and helping your team to settle down:

- ▶ **Acknowledge the tension.** Don't avoid the elephant in the room. A simple acknowledgment, such as saying "I can see that there are a lot of strong feelings about this topic," will let your team know that you are aware of the tension.

- ▶ **Check your own emotions.** While responding to anger in kind is a normal human reaction, it rarely improves the situation. If necessary, take a step back and regroup before wading into the fray. Remember, the first person you manage is yourself.
- ▶ **Project calm.** During tense moments, people will look to you to determine how they should react. If you are

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visibly defensive or seem to be taking a side, others will take that as their cue to pick sides as well.

- ▶ **Engage in pattern interruption.** By remaining silent in the face of anger or staying calm when others are upset, you disrupt their expectations and help them recalibrate their behavior.
- ▶ **Lighten the mood.** A well-timed joke may ease tensions and help your team focus on the task at hand. Jokes about intense subjects, such as situations that could impact your team's future employment, are ill-advised.
- ▶ **Ask for clarification.** Did the moment become heated due to a misunderstanding? Ask team members to explain and provide needed context.

- ▶ **Listen.** People from different disciplines may have varying perspectives regarding the primary concern in a given situation. Give each person time to explain their point of view. If necessary, remind your team of the importance of respectful language and behavior. (If individual employees have engaged in inappropriate behavior, address it privately.)
- ▶ **Reframe the situation.** Try a dose of realistic optimism that both acknowledges frustrations and recognizes the potential advantages of an alternative approach. Steer the conversation toward a solution-focused outcome.
- ▶ **Validate other points of view.** Sometimes, the likely approach will be obvious early in the

process. However, it is important to recognize other perspectives and their value to the discussion. Making sure your entire team feels heard may decrease the potential for hard feelings that could boil over in the future.

- ▶ **Gather information.** When questions must be answered before a decision can be reached, it may be best to schedule another meeting for a later date. List what items will need to be addressed prior to the next meeting and assign responsibility for gathering the needed information.
- ▶ **Change the subject.** When the discussion doesn't seem to be going anywhere, consider switching to a different topic. This may be as simple as saying, "Let's move on to the next item on the agenda."
- ▶ **Take a break.** If you are addressing an urgent concern, consider taking a short break before returning to the discussion. If there is time to "sleep on it," consider scheduling another meeting for the next day so that people have time to cool off and think through their responses.

A tense moment within your team may be a catalyst for needed changes. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help you look at ways to turn these difficult moments into opportunities for growth. Call today.

How Do I Say That? Angry Outbursts



Anger is a normal human emotion and a natural reaction to a difficult situation, and as such, is not unusual at work. However, some people may have difficulty controlling this feeling, resulting in angry outbursts.

When someone's frustration is disrupting workflow or impacting morale, it is important to take action. Here are some suggestions for addressing anger at work:

- 1. Consult with Human Resources.** Review any relevant policies. LifeMatters is also available to discuss your concern.



- 2. Meet privately with the employee.** Outline your concerns about their behavior.

Sample language: "I noticed that you became angry yesterday when (describe event). Could you provide your perspective on what happened?"

- 3. Allow the team member to vent.** Listen to what the person has to say without judgment or interruption. Allowing time to "let the fizz out of the bottle" may dissipate feelings of anger. It may also help pinpoint issues within your team,

such as problems with workflow or harassment by another employee, that may need to be addressed.

- 4. Express understanding.** Acknowledge that the anger may have been justified, but the outburst was not.

Sample language: "It makes sense that you would be upset by (incident). However, your reaction to the situation is not acceptable at work."

- 5. Make a plan.** Ask the person to think about better ways to manage anger in the future. Encourage the employee to let you know if they are struggling.

Sample language: "What actions can you take to prevent an outburst from occurring again?"

- 6. Communicate expectations.** Consult with Human Resources before taking any disciplinary action.

Sample language: "I expect (describe behavior) in the future. If you are feeling



overwhelmed and need a few minutes, please let me know and I will do what I can to help. However, if another incident occurs, (outline consequences).”

7. Refer the employee to

LifeMatters. Consider making a performance referral that will assist the employee with improving their workplace behavior.

Sample language: “LifeMatters can help you deal with anger. I recommend you give them a call.”

8. Follow up. Check in with the individual to discuss any performance improvements. In addition, consider addressing team or workplace issues that may have contributed to the person’s outburst.

Please note: If the employee has engaged in violent or threatening behavior, seek immediate assistance from HR or security. Always follow organizational procedures.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can assist with addressing angry outbursts and other disruptive behavior. Call anytime.

Management Consultation

LifeMatters is available to help with:

- ▶ Confronting an employee about performance issues
- ▶ An employee’s personal problem
- ▶ Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- ▶ Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- ▶ Establishing clear, attainable expectations for performance
- ▶ Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- ▶ Your own personal concerns
- ▶ Any other work-related issue

LifeMatters offers professional management consultation when you need it, as often as you need it. Call anytime.

Call the **LifeMatters®** Management Consultation Service toll-free anytime. **1-800-634-6433**

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