

THE Advisor

Defusing Workplace Tension



In this Issue:

Defusing
Workplace Tension

Managing
Angry Outbursts

Management
Consultation



Knowing how to defuse tension so your team can focus on solving the problem at hand is a valuable management skill.

Sometimes, a workplace conflict may lead to tension or even a full-blown argument. Competing priorities, misunderstandings, and worries about the impact of change are some common reasons why tempers may flare.

If you are faced with a tense moment during a meeting or conversation, these tips may help:

- **Manage your own emotions.** Take a step back and regroup, especially if you are upset by what was said. Responding in an angry or emotional fashion will only escalate the situation.

- **Lead by example.** During tense moments, people will look to you to determine how they should react. Keep in mind that the situation may require you to act as a neutral arbiter until the conflict is resolved.
- **Recognize interpersonal and team dynamics.** Keep in mind that tension could be a byproduct of interpersonal issues, such as personality conflicts or feeling disrespected by a colleague. Disagreements over where to allocate team resources could also occur.
- **Acknowledge the tension.** A simple acknowledgment, such as saying

Quick Tips:

- **Ignoring tension between team members may cause it to escalate**
- **Keeping the focus on solving problems and finding solutions may help defuse tension and get your team back on track**
- **The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help you develop valuable conflict management skills**

THE Advisor



Sometimes the best way to resolve tension is to listen to employees and let them know that they have been heard.

“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 emotions in play.

- **Engage in pattern interruption.** By staying calm when others are upset or angry, you disrupt expectations and help team members recalibrate their behavior.
- **Listen.** Once the tension has subsided, ask each employee to identify their primary concern and how it could be addressed. Reframe the problem into a solution-focused plan of action that supports team priorities.

- **Focus on respectful behavior.** Remind your team of the importance of respectful language and behavior. If individual employees have engaged in disrespectful behavior, address it in a private meeting.
- **Take a break.** If the situation allows, table the conversation until at least the next day. Giving your team time to sleep on the problem may help them cool off, rethink the situation, and come up with more constructive solutions.

Whether your team has an occasional disagreement or is constantly in a state of tension, the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help. Call 24/7/365.



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist with any management concern. Call 24/7/365.

How Do I Say That? Managing Angry Outbursts

Does a member of your team frequently get angry at work? If one of your employees has difficulty controlling their temper, these steps may help.

- 1. Document the behavior.** Make note of the dates, times, and details of the person's behavior. If angry outbursts tend to happen in a specific situation (such as when interacting with a co-worker), document that as well.
- 2. Consult with Human Resources.** Inform HR about the employee's behavior and review any relevant policies. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can also suggest ways to handle an angry outburst.
- 3. Schedule a private meeting with the employee.** Outline your concerns about the employee's behavior and its impact on your team.

Sample language: "You've openly expressed anger on several occasions. These outbursts are disruptive and make others uncomfortable."

- 4. Allow the team member to respond.** Some employees may be surprised, while others may feel that expressing their emotions demonstrates commitment to their work. Be



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can provide guidance on how to address an angry outburst.

respectful toward these reactions while also establishing guidelines for appropriate behavior at work.

Sample language: "I appreciate how much you care about your work. However, your behavior could be upsetting and may make it more difficult for your teammates to collaborate with you."

- 5. Make a performance referral to LifeMatters.** LifeMatters can help the employee cope with anger and develop better communication skills. LifeMatters is also available to assist the employee with personal concerns



LifeMatters offers 24/7/365 assistance with management concerns. We're here to help.

that may be affecting how they interact with others.

Sample language: "LifeMatters is available 24/7/365 to help you cope with work and personal concerns."

6. **Follow up.** Continue to observe the employee's behavior. Acknowledge any improvements and provide additional feedback. If further outbursts occur, contact HR.

Please note: If an employee's angry outbursts include threats against individual employees or the organization, contact HR and security immediately.

Management Consultation

Whenever you need it, as often as you need it. Reasons to call:

- 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 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®

LifeMatters® by Empathia

Assistance with Life, Work, Family, and Wellbeing

mylifematters.com • 24/7/365 • CRS TTY: 711

Call collect to **262-574-2509** if outside of North America

Language assistance services in your preferred spoken and written languages are available at no cost by calling 1-800-367-7474.

