



Business: Ten Tips For Handling a Difficult Situation With a Staff Member

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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So, everything is going fine - until it isn't anymore! One of your staff members is yelling and screaming about something that doesn't even make sense. Another one is quiet but refusing to work or talk. And you are the one who is responsible for the whole operation. What can you do?

1. Invite the upset staff member to meet with you in private. If you think this might be a threat to your safety, leave a door partially open so others can come to your aid if needed.
2. Stay calm - Your mood will be a direct influence on the other person. The last thing that you and that employee needs is to have two people in crisis at the same time and in the same room. Control your emotions!
3. Give short, clear sentences that will calm the other person. For example, you might say "Have a chair and we'll talk" or "Calm down and tell me what happened". Even though this might sound directive, an upset person sometimes doesn't know how to calm themselves and may, in fact, escalate unless they have help.
4. Tell the person that you are going to listen. Most people who are upset think that no one is listening or caring about their situation. You not only need to reassure them but also show them that you are actively listening.
5. Ask for respect when needed. Explain that name calling, bad language and threats are abusive behaviours that you do not deserve and will not tolerate.
6. Ask good questions - Make sure that you understand all the fact of the situation and not just the feelings that the person is expressing. Sometimes people become so resentful that they actually forget what happened that started the upset. Find out dates, names of other people involved and the order of events.
7. Make notes and then review the notes with the employee who will then be able to provide additional information or correct errors.
8. Tell the employee what you cannot do regarding the situation. For example: if you are not able to answer some of the questions, state that. If you cannot guarantee that certain things will happen, be clear about that.
9. Explain how you will handle the situation. Will you consult with someone else? What is the process that will be followed? Describe possible outcomes.
10. Make a plan with the employee regarding what will happen next. You might be able to say that you will call the employee on a certain date if you know that you will have information to share by then. Perhaps you will need to schedule another meeting with the employee to gather more information or provide further information for them. You may state that you need to speak with other management, union or staff before a resolution can be achieved. The important thing is that you have a plan and follow through on the timelines that you have laid out. If you don't - you will likely have an even more upset employee in the future and lose respect from others in the company who are watching.

Being a supervisor or manager can be very demanding roles, especially when you have difficult employees. If you stay calm and follow the process that is outlined above, however, you will likely be able to resolve most of the issues that arise in a competent and professional manner.