

Six Tips for Responding Constructively to Disrespectful Treatment in the Workplace

If a co-worker says or does something that upsets or angers you, it can be tempting to zap him or her right back in an equally offensive, or even worse, manner. But if you are a person who strives to treat others with respect and kindness, the satisfaction of stooping to another person's level of nastiness will probably be short lived.

While you may soon regret your initial aggressive response, the hangover effect of a war of words can last for months or years, making further interactions uncomfortable at least and unbearable at worst.

Sharone Bar-David, president of Toronto-based Bar-David Consulting and author of *Trust Your Canary: Every Leader's Guide to Taming Workplace Incivility*, estimates that fewer than five percent of workers know how to respond constructively to a negative encounter with a co-worker or boss.

"Any one of us can recall examples where our response was less than productive. Sometimes things got worse," she says, adding that we may have been left with scars and been reluctant, anxious or fearful to deal with that person in the future. And in extreme cases, bad blood between co-workers can escalate into workplace violence.

Here are six suggestions from Bar-David toward developing a constructive approach to dealing with uncivil or unwelcome behavior in the workplace:

1. **Set a "no scorched earth" goal.** Your objective should be to build the relationship rather than damage it. Shape your response accordingly.
2. **Think "addressing," not "confronting."** The way that we think about a situation has a profound effect

on how we approach it. When you think that you need to confront someone, your mind immediately categorizes the situation as adversarial and your whole being goes on battle alert. Rather than telling yourself that you need to confront the person, I recommend thinking in neutral terms such as addressing, discussing, dialoguing, exploring or dealing with.

3. **Express your reaction in a measured way.** Tone it down. Conveying your emotions in all their colorful potency will overwhelm the other person and reduce rational thinking. The same is true if you resort to sarcasm.
4. **Choose your words prudently.** Words can inadvertently turn a situation from constructive to destructive in a big hurry. The interaction will become charged and you won't even know why. One word to avoid is but, as in "I know you may have intended well, BUT..." It triggers defensiveness.
5. **Control your body language.** You can use the best-selected words, however, non-verbal communication that is laden with strong feelings such as anger, resentment, hurt and retaliation, will trump all else. Crossing your arms with a scowl on your face, sighing and rolling your eyes are examples of bad body language.
6. **Only the facts please.** Sharing the labels or conclusions you've attached to the other person's motives or personality, such as "You have zero respect for anyone else's opinion" will escalate the situation. Stick to the facts. What would a video camera capture without the help of a narrator? What would a fly on the wall have seen or heard when the problem occurred? 🌸

SAVING YOUR WORKERS' SKIN: TIPS FOR PREVENTING CUTS CONTINUED FROM COVER

guarding; using lockout/tagout procedures; ensuring that workers use PPE; ensuring that workers use tools safely; and insisting on good housekeeping practices.

Cuts and lacerations are commonly associated with the use of knives and other cutting tools. Suggestions for avoiding injury while using these tools include ensuring that:

- 🌸 Workers wear proper safety gear, including protective eyewear, the right type of gloves, and sleeves.
- 🌸 Workers always use the proper tools for a job.
- 🌸 Workers inspect tools for damage or defects before using them.
- 🌸 Workers keep their work areas tidy.
- 🌸 Tools are kept under control at all times.
- 🌸 Items being cut are secured, such as in a vice, and not hand-held while being cut.

- 🌸 Blades are always sharp. Dull blades require greater cutting force and increase the risk of a blade slipping and cutting a worker. Dispose of dull blades in an approved sharps container, or wrap them in heavy tape before putting them in the trash.
- 🌸 Workers stand in a well-balanced position when using knives.
- 🌸 The path of the cut is clear and the non-cutting hand is not in the path of the cut.
- 🌸 Several passes are made when cutting thick material, and the downward force of the knife is increased with each pass.
- 🌸 Exposed blades are not left unattended. Use self-retracting blades or fold the blade closed whenever possible.
- 🌸 Rounded-tip blades, rather than pointed-tip blades, are used whenever possible.
- 🌸 Knives are properly stored, for example, in a separate drawer, rather than with other tools. 🌸