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Getting Leaders and Employees Throughout the Organization to, Effectively and Simply, Deal with Inappropriate Comments as They Arise, i.e. Getting People to Stick Their Necks Out

There are many workplace challenges facing Canadians. From observations while working in the field of workplace and community human rights over many years, Stephen Hammond has chosen what he considers the top 10. This video transcript is intended to start a dialogue. If you feel it may help your workplace or your association, please use it. Print out the text, have a discussion, and try to come to resolutions that can be helpful to your group. The best way to deal with workplace challenges is to talk about them in a respectful way. If you would like to access the video that goes with the transcript, it can be purchased at HumanRightsTrainingStore.com

If you have a workplace where employees feel comfortable to speak up and resolve issues on their own, then you're ahead of most places where people fear sticking their necks out. Consider some approaches that can help to get everyone to address conflict and speak their mind... respectfully.

As a species, we stink at conflict. Actually, creating conflict, unfortunately we're quite good at it. Dealing with conflict – not so good. If we have an issue we want addressed, more times than not, we'll avoid it. We get very concerned that a small problem will escalate. Or we don't want to jeopardize our relationship with a certain person. Or we're afraid of losing clout, or even a job. So we let it pass. Perhaps it will resolve itself. Maybe it wasn't such a big deal after all. Or maybe that person will get another job.

Many of the cases I have read, or have discussed with clients in their workplace, involve small, or smallish items that, if handled early, could have been resolved with very little fanfare. In fact, I never would have heard about them, because common sense would have kicked in and people would have sat down and hashed it out.

If you are a workplace leader – a supervisor or manager at any level – you want to address issues as they arise. Once you know about them, whether informally or formally, you own it. If it's an issue related to Harassment or discrimination then from a legal perspective, it's as if the head of

your organization now knows about it. If from the start, you realize it's over your head, or you don't know what to do, then make sure you get help, or have someone else come up with a resolution. And be sure to follow up – don't let things fall between the cracks.

Most of the time, this doesn't involve any kind of formal investigation. You may know what needs to be done right away. Or you can ask a few simple questions and get to the bottom of a problem. Once you find out what the issue is, there is no other process than to talk it out. I wish there was a 3 step process, or something you can buy on a home shopping network, but there isn't. You simply have to identify the problem, find a resolution and hold people accountable to do what they agreed to do.

This can be as simple as getting a person to understand what she said was insensitive and to not repeat the comments. Or it might involve an apology. Or it might mean some kind of discipline. Whatever the result, the workplace leader has to ensure people stick to the resolution and if not, then there are consequences. No, not a firing squad, but some reasonable and legitimate process to hold people accountable.

If you leave a problem that involves human beings, communications, and feelings, I can pretty much guarantee it will get worse. So bite the bullet and start talking...to people. And remember, if it's more than you feel comfortable with, ask for help. Better to ask for help now than when things fall apart.

If you are an employee and you get comments or attention you don't like, you have to decide what you're willing to do. Most workplace issues come down to three approaches. You put up with the status quo, you make positive changes, or you quit. Lot's of people choose the status quo and lots of people quit – and quitting can mean staying in the job, but not really giving a damn – you're coasting.

If, however, you want positive change, this means you need to stick your neck out. You have to speak up to make a difference. You can speak directly to the person causing you the problem. You can speak to a colleague or supervisor to help you, or to resolve it for you. If you have specialized support, such as a Human Resources department, you can get assistance from someone within the organization, or perhaps external to your workplace. What you can't do, is nothing.

Perhaps you need to make some notes. Perhaps you need to give lots of thought to the issue. Maybe a bit of role playing would help. Check out info on the web or in journals. In other words, people don't have to be alone when dealing with many workplace issues. Even just talking to a

friend can help...but don't keep talking and complaining if you don't plan on taking a friend's advice, or you'll get labelled a whiner.

Back at work, all people – employees and leaders – need to be part of a process that enhances the ability to speak up and resolve issues. In other words, people have to listen when an employee is bringing up an issue that affects them. If there are nay-sayers who insist people suck up everything, or stop complaining, then you need to shut them down. And if people agree to certain behaviour changes, they have to be held to account. Otherwise it's like the parent who threatens to leave the restaurant with a misbehaving child and never follows through. What we learned as a child has great applicability later on in life.

If we deal with issues early on, they rarely turn into big problems. There's no other way to deal with issues. Talk about it. Listen. Have a dialogue. Come to a resolution. Stick to it. It may sound easy and it is. We just have to get better at resolving conflict.

What do you think?

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