

Solving Your People Management Challenges

Our “Difficult People Problem” this month is one that Managers nearly always cite as their worst nightmare! Many admit to not tackling it.

A team member complains that a co worker has bad body odour. What do you do?

Guidelines

- Firstly, difficult as this is to tackle, Managers need to remember that it is something that affects other team members and therefore must be addressed
- Consider holding the conversation towards the end of the day, so that the person doesn't have to immediately sit at work feeling embarrassed and also so they have a chance to act on the discussion
- Start the conversation by being up front about the fact that this is a “difficult conversation” for both of you
- Be direct – skirting round things will just increase anxiety levels for you both. Explain you want to discuss a delicate matter and it is about body odour.
- Be empathetic – the team member may not have realised and be embarrassed – or may have a medical condition that contributes to the issue. Either way, they will need an understanding approach.
- As with all difficult conversations, don't make assumptions about what is happening – use open questions to find out from the other person
- Initially, focus on the observations and feedback being yours – you do not want to make the person feel worse, by making them think the whole team are talking behind their back. If they ask if anyone else has noticed, be honest that someone else has commented to you.
- Offer support – ask what you can do to help (coping solutions we have come across include changing shirts half way through the day, taking a shower at work, having time to go and freshen up)
- Keep an eye on things to see if they improve. Nine times out of ten, a conversation like this will do the trick. If it doesn't, you will need to follow up and address it again.

Remember that if someone in your team falls short of expected standards, such as timekeeping or dress code or the way they talk to customers, as their manager you would talk to them about it, to pull it back on track. This is no different. It is reasonable to expect people to come to work meeting appropriate standards of personal hygiene.

**For more guidance on tackling your difficult people problems at work, call us on
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