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How to Be More Assertive: Discipline Made Easy

By Lyndsay Swinton

I learned the hard way how to be more assertive at work. After spending a couple of turbulent years hiring, firing and bringing factory workers into line, I figured out the best way to be firm but fair.

Tony's been a bad boy

You know it's coming. Tony has let you down again. It's time for you to get tough.

Scolding, talking to, ticking off, dressing down, reprimand, slap on the wrist.. Call it what you will, someday you will have to get tough and discipline your staff. Assertive discipline is a learned skill, and bloodshed or lawsuits can be avoided when handled well. Learn how to be more assertive at work, with this assertiveness article.

Know what's right

The single most important step to become more assertive as a manager, is to know what's right. Get yourself on a training course to learn the ins and outs of your company policies and employee rights, and any legal obligations you have to fulfil. And keep up to date.

Know your facts

Before you go steaming in and read the riot act, know your facts. Double check and corroborate dates, times, who said what to whom, etc so that you can be confident you have the correct information.

Two heads are better than one

Although you may have planned what to say and how to say it, always run it by someone else first. It's best to make mistakes in front of a sympathetic (and non litigious!) audience.

Good cop, bad cop

Consider role-playing the discussion, and practice being calm in the face of unpredictable reactions. Play around with different styles and see whether good cop or bad cop suits the situation, and you, best. The best approach generally, is calm, clear and consistent.

Take a break

If emotion can cloud your judgement, take a good physical or mental break before you have the discussion. Make sure you book time for the discussion in a private space, out of sight and ear-shot.

3 strikes and you're out

If this is the first discipline discussion, then the fairest approach is to spend most time on explaining exactly what needs to be done to resolve the situation or correct the behaviour. See the article on how to give negative feedback.

But if it's a serious "offence" or has been repeated many times without improvement, then it's time to get tough. Be brave and put your velvet gloves over your iron fist, making sure you remain firm but fair.

Cannot or Will Not?

Before you start formal disciplinary proceedings with someone, you need to establish whether it's skill or will that's the root cause. When you've agreed with your HR expert which way to go, follow the formal procedure exactly, keeping written notes of everything.

Yeah but, no but, yeah but.

Usually, the discipline discussion will go two ways. The easiest is when the person puts their hand up and promises to do better. More slippery people will get a sudden case of yeahbut or nobut disease and trip you up with excuses and confusion. Keep calm, keep your head and you'll see through their bluff and bluster.

This is exactly why knowing what's right and knowing the facts is essential. I coped with disciplining the Queen of all nasty employees by avoiding eye contact (which wasn't hard as she had a squint : >) by reading and repeating my notes.

Stock phrases such as "this is where we will have to agree to disagree" are invaluable for maintaining control of the discussion and moving things on.

Extra Help Is At Hand

There are products which show you how to become assertive. I recommend this Assertiveness Training mp3 download from www.HypnosisDownloads.com

It is possible to be more assertive at work. Assertive discipline begins in the classroom, learning about employment law and company policies. Be firm but fair, with a velvet glove over your iron fist, and you will be a respected, effective manager.

By Lyndsay Swinton
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