

CONNECTIONS

APRIL, 2019

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 4

LEADERSHIP *Matters*

Having the Talk: Difficult Conversations in the Workplace

By Michael Mccafferty, FEI Behavioral Health

In an ideal world, workplace behavior would always be pleasant, polite and professional. In the real world, however, employees sometimes display behavioral issues that require your attention.

Whether it's offensive language, poor hygiene, or attendance problems, disruptive behavioral issues can wreak havoc on the workplace. Unaddressed, these issues negatively impact your team, disrupt the work environment and lower morale and productivity.

As uncomfortable as it might be to talk with employees about these topics, it's easier if you keep a few basic principles in mind:

Fear is normal (have the talk anyway)

No one likes conflict or seeks it out intentionally. Even when it's obvious to everyone in the workplace that there's a problem, many managers avoid having "the talk" with employees long past the time such discussions are due. We usually hesitate to engage in these conversations because we're afraid they won't go well and that employees will become upset.

A good way to get out of the fear trap is to focus on facts, behavior and impact—NOT judgements and personalities. Approach the conversation by considering that employees don't always understand how their behaviors affect others around them or the environment overall. They may appreciate your concern.

Preparation

As a leader, you have an obligation to help employees do well and remove obstacles to their success. You can't do that by having an unprepared discussion about their performance or behavior. Focus on expectations and explain where



Happy Spring Everyone!

We tracked the top presenting issues that were brought to our internal Employee Assistance Program in 2018, and we wanted to share that experiencing (1) stress at work and (2) marital or significant other relationship struggles were the top two reasons employees utilized our EAP services last year. These two areas are a great demonstration of how our personal life and work life can impact one another, and why EAPs address both needs.

Our ability to capture top issues within our employee population helps us to think of relevant information for you and your family and tailor newsletters and trainings around those identified areas.

Be on the lookout for more of these statistics in upcoming newsletters!



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your employees are off target. State the facts and provide examples of what the desired behavior or performance looks like.

If the behavior in question violates company policy, make sure you're clear on what the policy says and any related procedures. Your employee should leave thinking they can do better. You want them to feel accountable for meeting their goals and knowing how to do it.

Confidentiality

Managers often get approached "confidentially" about offensive workplace behavior. While you need to use discretion and not unduly embarrass anyone, you can't guarantee someone will remain anonymous after complaining. Depending on what they disclose, you may have an obligation to act or report the situation to others.

Likewise, take care not to inappropriately share information with anyone who doesn't need to know. Remember, there's usually more than two sides to the story: The complaint, the employee who was complained about and the truth.

Consistency

Admit it: There are some members of your team you like more than others. But it's imperative that you hold all employees to the same performance expectations. To avoid seeming like you're picking on a certain individual or any particular group, always focus on the facts. Consider running it past a third party, like HR or your own supervisor.



Remain Calm

Make a strong effort to keep your own feelings in check. Discussions about challenging topics can easily become emotionally charged. As you talk, watch your employee's body language and tone of voice as well as your own. If things are escalating, stay calm and try to find common ground. If you feel that the employee isn't receiving what you're saying, or if things become too emotional, consider taking a break and trying again another time.

Difficult conversations are just that—difficult. But effective communication is a two-way street. By being mindful and actively employing the practices I've outlined, you'll be much closer to having constructive conversations that tackle those difficult workplace topics.

What is Forgiveness?

FEI Behavioral Health

Forgiveness is the process of letting go of hurt, resentment, sadness, anger, hate, a desire for retaliation, and a whole host of negative feelings that are associated with hurtful behavior that has been directed at you, someone you care about, or humanity as a whole. Forgiveness is releasing the burden of past pain. The key point to remember about forgiveness is that it is something you do for yourself and for your own wellbeing.

What Forgiveness Is Not

Forgiveness is not forgetting or denial of wrong action. As a matter of fact, the first step in forgiveness is to acknowledge the fact that you or someone you care about has been hurt by another person.

- Forgiveness is not rationalizing or excusing misbehavior.
- Forgiveness does not give permission for future misbehavior.
- Forgiveness does not require that you continue to be involved with the person who hurt you. You can forgive and still understand that the pain of the other person may be so great that it will continue to leak onto those in the vicinity in the form of hurtful behavior. Self-protection or keeping a distance may be required.

The Value of Forgiveness

Nelson Mandela said, "Hating someone is drinking poison and expecting the other person to die from it." This quote introduces you to the importance of forgiveness in living a resilient and happy life. Forgiveness keeps you from poisoning yourself with anger, hate, and resentment. There is substantial scientific research supporting the positive health effects of forgiveness. The process of forgiveness has been shown to result in reduced blood pressure and heart rate, lower anxiety, and a reduction in depression.

Beliefs Interfering with Forgiveness

Which of these statements describe your beliefs about forgiving someone who has hurt you?

- The hurt was so great, how can I possibly forgive?
- There are some things that can never be forgiven.
- She doesn't deserve to be forgiven.
- Why should I forgive? What he did was wrong.
- She has to pay for what she did.
- He'll suffer if I withhold forgiveness.
- If I don't retaliate, she'll (I'll) think I'm weak.
- Continuing to judge him makes me feel like I'm a better person than he is.
- Why should I show compassion for her? She certainly didn't care about how I felt.

Meanness is pain in disguise.

The Key to Forgiveness: Compassion

Philo of Alexandria said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." This quote provides you with the key to forgiveness, which is compassion. Forgiveness is possible when you understand that when a person behaves badly, that behavior is the person's own suffering leaking into the world, onto you, and onto other people in the form of negative behavior. When people behave badly toward you, you can be certain that the behavior is not about you, but a reflection of their overall approach to life and the degree of their pain and unhappiness, no matter what they would like you to believe about their behavior.

Forgiveness takes effort.

Mignon McLaughlin said, "What we forgive too freely doesn't stay forgiven." You must start slowly. Don't make a list of all of the hurt, anger, and resentment you carry that is currently poisoning you. The most difficult step in practicing forgiveness is learning to see the pain behind another's misbehavior. This takes practice, as with any effort at developing new skills and habits. You will want to start slowly. The first step in learning forgiveness is to start with the practice of compassion, which, as said

above, is the key to forgiveness. Part of compassion is to learn to see that everyone is swimming in the same soup.

Practice forgiveness.

As stated above, Philo of Alexandria said that "everyone we meet is fighting a great battle." That means that you will have ample opportunity to practice forgiveness: There is lots of pain leaking into the world, whether it be in the form of rudeness or thoughtlessness, or in the form of more significant misbehavior such as abuse and violence.

Here are some tips to begin practicing forgiveness:

- Identify feelings you have toward other people that are poisoning you with hatred, resentment, hurt, and the rest of the negative emotions that keep you stuck in the past and from which you need to heal. Forgiveness is about creating a new future free of this pain.
- Pick one person and identify the hurtful behavior you'd like to forgive. Start small, with a minor misbehavior that you'd like to stop carrying around with you.
- Remind yourself that other people's hurtful behavior is their pain (their "great battle") in disguise. If you can, try to understand what that pain is.
- Determine whether the goal is simply forgiveness, or forgiveness and reconciliation (restoring the relationship). Remember that reconciliation requires more than forgiveness. It requires three things of the other person. Consider reconciliation to be your goal only if the following are true:
 1. The individual acknowledges the misbehavior and apologizes. It's important to understand that an apology is not about past behavior; it's really a promise about future behavior. It's a promise not to do it again. Repeated apologies about the same behavior are nothing more than broken promises and don't need to be taken seriously.
 2. The individual asks for forgiveness.
 3. The individual does not repeat the behavior.

Source: LifeLines/2019



De-Escalation Tip of the Day: Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon

By Heather Vaughn, Crisis Prevention Institute

A favorite story in our household is recounting the time that my mother-in-law made a special holiday dinner for Bisquick, our first family dog. Bisquick is a miniature dachshund, and like all small dogs, she dreams of being mighty. Unfortunately, since she is only about five inches tall, these dreams will never come true. One Thanksgiving, my mother-in-law made a beautiful Thanksgiving dinner for her family, and then thought it would be cute to make a miniature, yet equally beautiful, Thanksgiving dinner for Bisquick.

Nancy, my mother-in-law, is a lovely person inside and out. Her home is as elegant as an Architectural Digest photo; her cooking as sumptuous as anything Julia Child ever whipped up on PBS. And the plate that she fixed up for her son's tiny dog? No exception.

Bisquick's Thanksgiving meal was served on the good china. In miniature portions reflective of what the humans were eating, Nancy arranged a dachshund-sized serving of everything on a little saucer. A tiny wedge of a yam. A trio of peas. A postage stamp of cornbread. A small pipette of mashed potatoes. All daintily arranged around the pièce de résistance: a single slice of turkey with a perfect, petite dollop of gravy.

That's when Bisquick began to lose her **Rational Detachment**.

"Now, Bisquick," Nancy said, completely oblivious to the fact that the dog she addressed was becoming utterly undone with desire at the sight of an entire tray of human food. "I want you to eat this little meal very nicely, okay?"

Bisquick wasn't hearing it. A) Bisquick is a dog, and her grasp of English is questionable at best. But B) this turkey was an immediate trigger. It was the most succulent of forbidden pleasures, since Bisquick does not normally get table scraps. This little hound was now escalating into crisis mode, and all she cared about was how rapidly she could connect with that fragrant protein my mother-in-law was holding, so temptingly, just out of reach.

"I'm going to set this down on the kitchen floor," Nancy said, beginning to crouch. "And I just want you to be a nice little doggie and not make a mess."

Bisquick didn't look as though she was very serious about complying. As the plate came ever closer to the tiles, her lips parted, her mouth foaming with rabid hunger, her teeth bared as if she were being gradually possessed by some demonic force.

The moment the plate connected with the floor, Bisquick, fully convinced that this must be some strange trick, grabbed the turkey from the plate and bolted for the furthest destination from the kitchen with her score.

This remote hideout was the living room, which had recently been adorned with brand-new white carpeting.

"Bisquick! No!" Nancy shrieked, giving chase.

Panicked, Bisquick did the only thing she could—she froze in place, pressed her face to the rug and bore down on the gravy-soaked meat as furiously as she was able. Growling and snapping as she gobbled up her treasure, her primal wolf brain took over, splattering a sizable radius of the pristine rug with brown gravy and fat.

Nancy didn't know about **Nonviolent Crisis Intervention®** training back then, otherwise she might have used this top CPI de-escalation tip: **Choose wisely what you insist upon**.

Is a rule negotiable or not? Would exhibiting a bit of flexibility head off an altercation, or does insisting on something lay the groundwork for a power struggle? Can you afford the carpet cleaning that might ensue if you needlessly stick to your guns?

Keep your eyes on the big picture—remember to see the individual behind the challenging behavior. Bisquick was acting like Cujo, but in truth, she was just a dog who was out of her element—confused, hungry, and reacting out of anxiety. Perhaps insisting that she eat like a lady was a rule that could have been waived. Perhaps skipping the formal porcelain and putting the food in a dog bowl, and letting Bisquick chow down on the back porch like the scruffy little wildling she is—perhaps these few accommodations could have prevented her escalation. In retrospect, these are all insights we gleaned as a family. Unfortunately, they came too late, and at the cost of Nancy's tasteful décor.

But then again, if we'd been proactive, we wouldn't have this wonderful family story.

Not all crises are adorable. Not all messes respond well to steam-cleaning. But CPI training really does work, and that's why "prevention" is our middle name.

This information is not a substitute for Nonviolent Crisis Intervention® training offered by CPI.



CPI's De-Escalation Techniques

Due to the variety and nature of the work that many City employees do, there are times when employees may find themselves in an uncomfortable situation with a member of the public, or perhaps even another employee, who may be struggling with their mental health, has a cognitive or intellectual status different from our own, sees reality differently than we do, has a medical condition or medication imbalance, or has found themselves in an uncomfortable situation and is expressing themselves very inappropriately or perhaps even aggressively in the workplace. While we recommend calling 911 if anyone feels immediately threatened or unsafe for themselves or someone else due to the words or actions of another person in their work environment, sometimes situations do not rise to the level of contacting law enforcement, or you may find yourself in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or threatened but are unable to distance yourself from the individual making you uncomfortable, confused, afraid, or angry. Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) is a widely utilized and useful resource that teaches employees and organizations how to de-escalate disruptive and assaultive behavior in safe, non-violent, and respectful way, and they have developed a list of Top Ten De-Escalation Tips which the EAP will be providing to you in this and upcoming newsletter articles. If you have more questions on de-escalation in the workplace, you can confidentially contact the EAP at 266-6561 or you can view upcoming trainings offered by Human Resources on their [training website](#).

Opioid Abuse on the Rise Among Older Adults

The opioid abuse epidemic is far from over, and it's impacting more than just our youth.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported a significant increase in those treated for opioid overdose among Americans of all ages, particularly individuals ages 55 and older. With Baby Boomers comprising almost 30% of the U.S. population, it's essential that we all understand and respond effectively to drug abuse.

Whether prescribed or not, drug abuse is a family problem. For every person who abuses drugs, at least three others suffer the consequences.

What can family members do?

- Get educated on drug use
- Remove any unused prescriptions from the house and locate a safe medicine disposal site
- Ask health care providers to recommend other forms of pain management
- Assist loved ones in getting help



Need help? Your EAP can provide additional guidance and resources.

WEBINAR

04.17.19

11:00am CT

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The Real Impact of Opioids: A Personal Story

We often hear and read about the tragic outcomes of the opioid epidemic, but we rarely engage in the history of users for real-life insight. Through a unique lens into the lives of two people significantly impacted by the opioid epidemic, learn more about the realities of opioid dependence, situational awareness, warning signs and much more.

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How to Stay Focused at Work While You're Going Through a Breakup

By Kristin Wong, [Lifehacker.com](https://lifehacker.com) (Used by permission of the author)

Breakups don't just kill romance—they can disrupt nearly every area of your life. You don't feel like doing things you enjoy, you can't stop thinking about the ex, and you may find it incredibly difficult to focus on work. If you're having trouble staying productive during a breakup, here are some ways to power through it.

The end of a relationship feels a lot like losing a loved one, because, well, you are losing a loved one. It's hard to accept that person will no longer be in your life (or at least not in the same way). Of course, it's important to go through all of the stages of mourning and properly heal from your breakup. But in this post, we're focusing on the specific steps you can take to cope in your work life. Healing is part of that, but here's how you can stay productive while you're healing.

Focus on Smaller Tasks

You've probably heard to "take things one day at a time". It's cliché, but it's true. Getting over a breakup is sort of like any other goal. It helps to break the healing process into smaller, digestible steps. Thinking about the weeks or even months you'll have to endure heartbreak is overwhelming. Instead, focus on getting through the pain for that day, or even the next few hours.

You can translate this concept to your work, too. When you have a work project and your mind is on the breakup, you might be in no mood to get things done. But take it one task at a time. Focus on powering through just the one task at hand. Don't think about the next one until you get there.

I tried this when I went through a breakup years ago. When I thought about long-term work projects, I felt defeated. I thought, how am I to get through this for the next month feeling this crappy? Instead, I told myself if I could just get through one task that lasted an hour, that'd be enough.

Soon enough, I found that I actually enjoyed the work because it gave me a small reprieve from the heartbreak.

Schedule "Emotional Interrupts"

It might seem like you should try to completely forget about the breakup and move on. But rather than sweep your feelings under the rug, it helps to work through them.

One study in *Social Psychology and Personality Science* suggests that periodically reflecting on a breakup can actually help you heal faster. Researchers studied 210 people who recently went through a breakup. Half of the subjects were instructed to come into the lab regularly and answer questions about their breakup for the next nine weeks. The other half was only asked to complete two surveys—one at the beginning of the study, and one at the end. The first group recovered better. According to the study:

Participants in the measurement-intensive condition reported larger decreases in self-concept disturbance over time; no other main effects were observed based on condition. Improvement in self-concept clarity (for people in the measurement-intensive condition) explained decreases in breakup-related emotional intrusion, loneliness, and the use of first-person plural words when describing the separation.

You can periodically reflect by taking an occasional break throughout your workday. Jose Gonzalez, author of *How to Get Over Your Ex*, calls it an "emotional interrupt." He suggests devoting this time to thinking about your emotions and learning how to heal. Learning might mean talking through the breakup with a friend so you can better understand it. It might mean reading articles like this, on how you can cope with things. The purpose of an "emotional interrupt" is to progress from the heartbreak and regain emotional control.

For me, it helped to journal. At lunch, I wrote a few sentences on how I was feeling about the breakup and any thoughts I had on those feelings. It helped to put it on paper, because I could clear my head and focus on work. It also gave me permission to reflect, so I wasn't distracted all day trying to ignore my emotions. I knew I'd have time to deal with them later by journaling.

But Don't Dwell, Either

On the other hand, journaling doesn't work for everyone. In some cases, it could make things worse. A study in *The Atlantic* found that some recently-heartbroken folks actually felt worse after being instructed to journal their breakup for 20 minutes each day. *Jezebel* reported on it:

"If you're someone who tends to be totally in your head and go over and over what happened and why it happened, you need to get out of your head and just start thinking about how you're going to put your life back together and organize your time," said lead author and psychological scientist David Sbarra. "Some people might naively call this avoidance, but it's not avoidance."

It is just re-engagement in life, and the control writing asks people to engage in this process.”

You don't want to avoid the breakup, but you don't want to be overly engrossed in it either. That's probably why Gonzalez recommends scheduling the time separate from work, and not just reflecting during that time, but also learning. The bottom line: take time to deal with the breakup productively, but be careful not to dwell on it. Find the right balance based on your own situation and personality.

Ignore Your Phone

You probably know it's best to cut communication with the ex while you're recovering. This gives you time to think about things rationally on your own. But it's always tempting to send a text or pick up the phone, especially if your ex reaches out to you first.

To combat this temptation and avoid the rush of emotions that comes with post-breakup communication, stay away from your phone. This might mean turning it off. If that's not possible, it might mean blocking your ex's number. If your ex could email you, you might avoid checking your personal account while you're at work.

The point is, you want to avoid bringing drama from your personal life into work, and when you're going through a breakup, it might be hard to do this, since emotions are riding high. Minimizing any possible communication with your ex during work hours will ensure your mind is on work, and help you stay productive.

It also helps ensure you won't text friends throughout the day to talk about the breakup. Again, it does help to work through your emotions and learn from them. But that's why you should reserve interrupts—so you can set aside time to do this without it affecting your productivity.

When Your Ex Works In Your Office

Of course, if you work with your ex and have to see them every day, it's a lot more difficult. Chiara Atik, author of *Modern Dating: A Field Guide* tells Forbes:

It's not so much the end of a romantic relationship as it is a transition into a more distant, professional one. Your ex is still a part of your everyday life, and rewiring how you think of them and how you communicate with each other is challenging.

There are a few habits that can help get through this challenge.

- **Keep things professional:** Don't badmouth your ex at the office, and don't talk about the breakup with co-workers.
- **Don't talk about the relationship with your ex at work:** It's even more tempting to rehash the breakup when your ex is in the same building. Do what you can to avoid this temptation, and that probably means avoiding your ex whenever possible. Again, keep things professional and only discuss business.
- **Focus on work:** It sucks to associate your job with your ex, so focus on your skills instead. Pick up some new ones and think about how you can improve yourself and make your work more challenging and satisfying.

You'll have to try a bit harder to think of your professional life as separate from your personal life. In the meantime, you can stay productive by doing what you can to remain professional and focusing on yourself, your job, and your skills.



Build a New Routine

Sometimes, part of the reason breakups suck so much is less because we miss the person and more because we miss the routine we had with them. As we've explained before, when you love someone, you usually integrate them into your day-to-day routine. When they're gone, you don't know how to handle the lapses in that routine. For example, if they always did the dishes, doing the dishes is going to dredge up a whole fountain of emotions, making the task seem more arduous than it is.

In fact, it can be a lot like an addiction. That's what researchers from Stony Brook University found when they compared the brains of drug addicts with those of people who recently went through a breakup:

[T]he fMRI results of the study show that looking at a romantic rejecter and cocaine craving have several neural correlates in common. The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that romantic rejection is a specific form of addiction (Fisher 2004). The perspective that rejection in love involves subcortical reward gain/loss systems critical to survival helps to explain why feelings and behaviors related to romantic rejection are difficult to control and lends insight into the high cross-cultural rates of stalking, homicide, suicide, and clinical depression associated with rejection in love.

You'll have to kick the habit. We've suggested reminding yourself that reestablishing your routine is part of reclaiming your independence. And it can help you feel stronger to change that routine up a bit.

If you used to call your ex from your desk at lunch every day, lunchtime is now going to seem emotionally unbearable. Change the routine you're used to by leaving the office and having lunch with a coworker instead. If you used to swing by your ex's house after work, you



might get emotional as you start thinking about them toward the end of the day. Fill that space with another routine—going to the gym, perhaps. You want to establish new, independent routines that put an end to those emotional triggers. This not only helps you stay more productive, it's also an important part of healing.

When you're dealing with a breakup, it can feel like your world is turned upside down. It's hard to stay focused and productive during that time. But the above steps should help you regain a little more control as you heal.

*Thanks for reading,
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the
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