

WELCOME TO TRACK TRAINING TIPS NUMBER 41

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'Holding Difficult Conversations with staff'

Now ... as most of you know, I am not a marketing professional, and sometimes I need to follow my own advice! Stop being busy and focus on the objectives! So I thought I would take time out and check the most popular training solutions over the last couple of years.

Now I know that I should not have been surprised, because even the most experienced managers seem to go weak at the knees when faced with the need to have a conversation with a 'difficult' member of staff.

Here then is a practical guide to achieving the required outcome in a professional and assertive manner:

1. **What are the required outcomes from this conversation?** Be very clear what it is you want to achieve – a change of behaviour, greater self reliance, better time keeping, improved motivation. As Peter Drucker says: "If you don't know where you are going chances are you will end up somewhere else.'
2. **Gather your facts.** Separate fact from fiction/opinions. Have more than one example ready to offer. Don't make it personal.
3. **Gather supporting documentation/evidence.** Job descriptions, person specifications, training records, development review notes.
4. **Book an appropriate room for an appropriate time.** Plan to be uninterrupted for as long as it takes. It might take two or three sessions to achieve understanding and commitment.
5. **Beware of managers who say that they don't have the time.** Don't have the time to manage and coach the performance of their staff? Sounds like they are part of the problem not part of the solution. Retrain them or move them on.
6. **Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.** Yes, I know that you know this already! So just do it. Like all meetings plan the before, during and after to achieve your outcomes. Which by the way, is a motivated and committed employee.
7. **Set the scene.** Welcome professionally, state the issue, listen, discuss, agree the way forward.
8. **Remember the key skills.** This is the part where it usually goes pear shaped for you. Listening, questioning, empathy, rapport, relationship building, body language, assertiveness and the ability to manage potential conflict. Short on these skills? Get some training.
9. **Produce an Action Plan.** Not War and Peace. Keep it simple: who/what/when. Under promise, over deliver.

10. **Celebrate Success.** However small it may be. Remember the purpose of the meeting. Follow up, coach, gather further evidence (hopefully of the improved performance).

Remember: that there are no guarantees of success, after all you are dealing with people! However, I strongly believe, after 20 years in the Training and Development field, that the more of the above that you don't do (and in the right order), the greater your chances of failure.

Hope this helps.

Best Regards

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p.s. £500.00 of free monies are still available from Business Link towards your Training and Development needs.