



Dealing with Employee Issues

We've all heard the saying, "It's not WHAT you say, but HOW you say it that counts." This saying is vital when discussing employee issues. As business coaches, we often find that business owners either let employee issues slide or end up handling them in a manner that doesn't create the most productive environment. The reasons for mishandling employee issues vary such as:

- Confidence
- Wanting to be seen as a good boss
- Not wanting to lose a key employee
- Having a short temper
- Being tired of telling someone how to do the same thing multiple times
- Waiting too long to address an issue
- Avoiding conflict
- Not being confident in how to approach an issue

The root cause though is that most people simply don't have a well thought out format to use when dealing with employee issues. Yes, we're talking about having a system in place, one that allows you or your managers to effectively have tough conversations with your staff.

So where do you get started with an employee issue? The first step is always about preparation and starts with creating an Employee Notification Form, which will be used to address the issue at a meeting with your employee. This form serves several purposes including: allows you to be clear and direct, allows you to work through any emotions before discussing the issue with the employee, and can be used as documentation in the employee file. At this stage, elements of your form should include:

- **The Result:** what needs to happen to make this meeting a success
- **The Issue:** specific bullet points on what the issue is
- **Examples:** specific examples of when the issue has occurred recently
- **Why:** the impact this issue is having on the business
- **Acknowledgement:** a pausing point in the conversation to get the employee's agreement that this is an issue that needs to be solved. If the employee doesn't agree, your issue is with their buy-in, not with the issue at hand.

Later in this document we'll add to the elements needed to create a system that addresses an employee issue, but to start the meeting, you need to first work through this section. As you create your Employee Notification

This document is confidential and proprietary to [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#) and cannot be used, disclosed, or duplicated without the prior written consent of [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#). This is an unpublished work protected by federal copyright laws.



Form, be intentional about the language you use. Are you setting the tone that will reach your result statement? Are you adding too much emotion or even making the conversation too light hearted? Focusing on the right language in the agenda will help to ensure that you set the right tone in the meeting.

Quote and Question

Quote: "An employee's motivation is a direct result of the sum of interactions with his or her manager." - Bob Nelson

Question: In what ways do your interactions with your staff impact their motivation?

Our Thoughts: As we mentioned last week, it's not always WHAT you say, but HOW you say it that counts. Last week, we discussed creating an agenda for dealing with employee issues. This week we encourage you to take a look at the interactions you have with your employees when you first learn of an issue. How does your natural reaction to employee issues set the tone for creating a solution?

Walk Around with Curiosity:

What do you do if you have a headache? It's always fun to hear the different methods people use to treat a headache. Many ignore it or take an aspirin. Some turn down the lights or apply a compress to the back of their necks. The common theme is that most people treat the symptom and not the cause of the headache. This is similar to how most business owner's deal with employee frustrations. We challenge you to slow down when facing an employee issue. Don't give in to the temptation to treat the symptom right away, but walk around the issue with curiosity. In doing so you will come to see the real issue and be able to create a long lasting solution.

Going into the conversation with the mindset of being curious will in itself have a positive impact on your meeting, but here are a few tips to help you walk around the issue with curiosity.

- **Don't make assumptions** - If you go into the meeting thinking you know what is causing the problem and how to solve the issue, you miss the chance to learn about your business. You may be spot on, but chances are you have more to learn if you sit back and listen. We all make assumptions, the key is to identify your assumptions before the meeting and then ask open ended questions around the assumptions.
- **Identify and discuss systems** - If you have systems in place that are not being followed, you want to pull them out and with the employee identify where the system is breaking down. Is it truly an employee issue or could you have a system issue? If you don't have a documented system in place this is a great time to discuss and document the rough steps for the system. This way you know that you and the employee are on the same page.



- **Focus on Impact** - Ask questions to see if your employee understands the importance and why the issue needs to be resolved. If they are not connected with the result, it will be difficult to get to a long lasting solution. Focus on the impact the issue has on the business, on them, and the clients.
- **Ask; Don't Always Tell** - In order to reach a long term solution you need to change your employee's mindset about the issue. You can and should be clear about the result the business needs. However, if you simply tell the employee what needs to be different they do not have the chance to challenge the way they think about the issue. Make sure you take time to explore the issue with them by asking open ended questions. As you listen you will be able to discover the root of the problem and help them begin to look at the issue in a new light.

Plan and Follow Up

Often times, creating a solution is not an interactive activity with the employee, but rather a lecture. This leads to solutions that are not long lasting. Here are a few tips to help you create a long lasting solution:

- **The Solution Needs to Include Clear Action Steps** - Too often meetings to deal with employee issues end with a generic, "I'll try harder" or "I won't be late again". While you want that result, a true solution is focused on action steps that eliminate the root problem. Your employee should leave the meeting with a clear set of actions they need to take. If a generic solution is given, be assertive and ask questions to uncover the actions steps they need to take.
- **You Should Provide Insight not the Solution** - If you want your employee to take ownership of the issue, your role is to guide them to a solution. It's tempting and might be faster to tell them what they need to do, but you should focus on empowering the employee to create a solution. This not only helps with the buy-in that they have now, but it will also help them develop problem-solving skills.
- **Ask what Training and or Help They Need from You** - Sometimes the solution isn't just about taking action, but the lack of knowledge or a skill set that needs to be developed. You can and should be clear on what action steps need to be taken, but if the issue is important you might also need to put resources toward developing the employee's skill set.
- **Get a Signature** - Having the employee sign the plan is good for documentation, but it also sends a strong message that this is serious.
- **Follow Up is a Must** - Chances are the steps to solving the issue are not a one and done situation. If you expect perfection, you are setting your employee and business up for failure. Instead, focus on progress and milestones. You're not going from 0 to 60 overnight. The timing in between milestones depends on the importance of the issue, but could even be daily check-ins. The follow up should continue until you are convinced that the new habit is established. A good way to check this is to slow down the frequency of check-ins instead of stopping all at once.

This document is confidential and proprietary to [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#) and cannot be used, disclosed, or duplicated without the prior written consent of [Benchmark Business Group, LLC](#). This is an unpublished work protected by federal copyright laws.