

# Having *that* conversation

## Postponing difficult confrontations with employees often costly

Business owners and managers realize that having difficult conversations with employees sometimes comes with the job. So owners and managers attend training and listen to webinars that outline what difficult conversations sound like. They gain an understanding of what's expected and plan on how they're finally going to talk to "that" employee.

Only the conversation never occurs. Then the problem becomes even worse because the potential outcome includes a hostile work environment and decreasing employee morale and productivity. The costs of not having a difficult conversation usually far outweigh any temporary comfort gained in putting off the conversation with the expectation the issue will resolve itself.

The situation is understandable. Owners and managers get back to the office and get to work on the pile of paperwork that's been building since they started working on budget cuts. They decide now is not the right time for that difficult conversation.

But the work environment in the office often suffers as a result of that conversation not happening. Other members of the team don't understand how owners and managers can't recognize the problem. The team divides and the workplace deteriorates further into a battlefield that becomes the basis of a hostile work environment lawsuit. Once a team divides, morale suffers. As morale declines, the team no longer functions as a productive unit or focuses on a common goal. Once lost, morale is not an easy thing to manage or replace.

Owners and managers have to start working with individuals rather than the team as a whole, increasing the

time spent on overseeing staff. Individuals disengage from the pursuit of team goals and start to look out for their own interests, giving rise to equity issues.

The John Stacey Adams equity theory tries to explain how motivation and job satisfaction are byproducts of a fair distribution among team member inputs and outputs. Equity becomes the measurement within the team based on each member's input and the benefits gained from that input. If a team member believes the distribution of inputs and outputs isn't equitable, they'll take steps to create equity. One such step is to reduce the amount of inputs they're willing to contribute, which in turn drains productivity. As morale declines, so does productivity. Meanwhile, employee absenteeism increases.

It's possible to assign a monetary value to the situation — in a lost customer account due to a missed deadline, work missed when employees call in sick and the loss of valuable employees who leave the organization.

Now the work environment is hostile, morale and productivity are down and absenteeism is on the rise. Surly now is not the right time to have that difficult conversation, right? And so the cycle continues.

Having a difficult conversation is by definition "difficult." But the costs of *not* having that conversation can make the situation even more difficult.

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