# THE CASE FOR **CANDOR**

Candor is widely misunderstood and sadly lacking in most personal and professional relationships. Perhaps you feel the word *candor* has a negative connotation, and thus you don't believe you can afford to try it. But have you ever considered how a lack of candor affects you, both in business and in the rest of your life? Take a look at these scenarios.

Have you ever interviewed for a position but failed to receive the job offer, and you never figured out why?

Has a longtime friend ever suddenly stopped calling, with no explanation?

Have you ever had a great date, but never heard from that person again?

I'll bet you wondered what went wrong in all those situations. What should you do differently to get the job the next time? What happened to that friendship—was it something you said or did? Why no second date?

If you're like most of us, instead of calling to find out what really happened, you made assumptions.

Now consider your relationships with people you are paying to provide a service. If you sit too long in your doctor's waiting room, do you tell your doctor that you consider the delay disrespectful and a waste of your time? Or do you find a new doctor? If your accountant makes a mistake, do you give feedback about the error, or do you find a new accountant? If you receive poor service in a restaurant, do you let the manager know, or do you just stop eating there?

My hunch is that you've kept quiet every time.

The fact is we're all a bunch of wimps. Even our closest friends don't speak up about the things we do that disappoint them. They don't want to cause conflict, hurt our feelings, or damage the relationship. But when someone does not speak up, the relationship is damaged anyway. If the offending behavior continues, friends drift away and the relationship dies.

## NO NEWS IS NOT NECESSARILY **GOOD NEWS**

The same is true of our bosses and coworkers. The people we work with are afraid to confront us directly as problems accumulate. So we end up being caught off guard in performance reviews and meetings. Have you ever had a performance appraisal in which the feedback was all news to you—bad news? You thought you'd had a great year. Obviously, your boss didn't agree. Instead of giving you ongoing feedback throughout the year, she waited twelve months to tell you that you weren't meeting her expectations.

How many meetings have you attended in which you really needed your coworkers' support, but they said nothing? How many "happy" employees suddenly left your organization because they had ongoing frustrations and dissatisfactions you never knew about? How did those encounters make you feel? Wouldn't it have been great if you could have eliminated those situations entirely or at least gained enough control to dramatically minimize their occurrence?

All these issues stem from a lack of candor in our relationships. Unfortunately, many people associate the word *candor* with bad news. We tell ourselves we're being kind to our friends and the people we work with by not being candid and giving direct feedback. But we're not being kind. We're being timid, passive, and unhelpful.

## HUMAN BEINGS ARE **"WHY" MACHINES**

As human beings, we have a need to know and understand why things occur. When we don't know, we make up stuff, and the stories we create are never good. *"I'm not good-looking enough, and I'll always be single." "My boss doesn't like me, and I have no future here."*

You might be right. You might be wrong. But either way, you're just guessing. In the business world, guessing is inefficient. It renders you, dare I say, impotent. You need to know what people are saying behind your back, because what people think and say about you impacts your career more than any project you deliver or sale you make.

## YOU **CAN'T** WRITE YOURSELF A BIGGER PAYCHECK

What *you* think, unfortunately, makes no difference in your career. The only thing that matters is the other person's perspective of reality. If you're bored at work and think you're ready to take on more responsibility but your boss thinks you don't show enough initiative or that you need to strengthen your skills, your opinion won't get you promoted. If you think you provide great customer service but your customers don't agree, you'll lose them.

Here's the challenge: Most of us have no idea how we come across to others or what our employers and colleagues think of our services. We don't know what people think because, for the most part, they don't tell us. Instead, they tell other people behind our backs. This is why we need to encourage people to be candid with us, even when it hurts to hear their feedback. Otherwise, we'll operate under false assumptions and make unnecessary, career-killing mistakes.

## **SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT** ON CANDOR

Candor is not bad news, and a candid organizational culture is not necessarily about saying hard things. Instead, candor is asking more questions at the onset of relationships. Candor is stating expectations rather than expecting employees and vendors to read your mind. Candor is making a commitment to talk about things as they happen, not six months after the fact.

Don't guess what people want or what they think about your performance. Ask them. In candid cultures, coworkers, employers, and employees say what they need to say quickly and easily. They have created relationships in which all parties can speak openly without concern.

## **YOU** CREATE YOUR CAREER

You can create effective and open business relationships with no nasty surprises, and doing that will give you more power and control over your results. After all, information is power, and power is control. When you know what people think and say about you, you have choices. When you understand the impact of your behavior and consciously choose your outcomes, you are in charge of your career.

In contrast, when you don't know what others are thinking and saying, you don't know the impact of their opinions. You're operating in default mode. Other people are in charge of your career and your life.

What if building powerful and effective business relationships was as simple as asking the right questions? This book presents a proven strategy for business success that is as bold as it is simple: Ask more. Assume less.®

My commitment to you is that if you use the tools and techniques outlined in the remainder of this book, you will be able to:

- Establish trust in all your relationships
- Set expectations with coworkers, direct supervisors, and clients and tell others what you need
- Have smoother working relationships

- Decrease silos and increase partnerships on teams and between departments
- Get and keep the right employees and manage employees with more ease
- Get the best work from employees
- Earn more opportunities and responsibility
- Reduce gossip and drama in your office
- Become more efficient and eliminate redundancies
- Take charge of your career and your future
- Increase your career and life satisfaction

You are in charge of your career success and satisfaction. If you don't know it already, this book will help you understand that much of your career satisfaction lies in the quality of your working relationships. The chapters that follow provide a commonsense, easy-to-follow methodology to create smoother and more open working relationships that will enable you to get more done in less time.

If you want to take charge of your career, invest time in your business relationships. Ask questions about what people need, want, and are expecting from you. It's that simple.

CHAPTER 1

# HOW TO ESTABLISH **CANDID** RELATIONSHIPS

Did you buy this book hoping for the secret formula that would reveal how to safely tell your boss he's a jerk? Or to learn how to tell "the lingerer" (you know, that person who stops by your desk to drop something off and thirty minutes later is still blabbing about her personal life) to go away? Well, you're in luck. Later in this book, I'll give you that formula. *But the formula is not what you're missing.*

There is an abundance of books on how to give feedback—*Difficult Conversations*; *Fierce Conversations*; *Crucial Conversations*; and *Dealing with Difficult People* are just a few of the titles that are out there. Many of you have read them, and most organizations offer training on how to get through difficult conversations and manage conflict. Yet most people say nothing when others frustrate them.

You can read all the books and attend all the training programs you want, and it will make little difference. It's not just technique that you're lacking.

And it's not necessarily that you don't know what to say. It's that you feel you can't say what you want to say. You haven't been given permission. Without receiving prior permission, you feel at risk to speak up—so you don't.

*What you're lacking is an agreement.* You would never buy a car or rent an apartment without a contract. But you have relationships without contracts all the time. Where is the agreement that defines how you will work with your coworkers or customers, and how they will work with you? What? You've never heard of such an idea? Well, that's exactly why you're reading this book.

We assume people will do things the same way we do, such as be on time for appointments, pay their fair share in a restaurant, and tell us in advance if they're going to miss a deadline—because that's what we do. We don't tell people what we expect from them, because we don't think we need to.

It's a little like being frustrated that you weren't given a project to manage that you never asked for. Or hoping for a new iPad for your birthday but not telling anyone, and then being annoyed when you receive a series of coffee-table books that will go straight to your re-gifting shelf.

**YOU:** "How could he not know I wanted an iPad?"

**THE VOICE OF REASON:** "Because you never told him."

**YOU:** "But I shouldn't have to tell him. He should just know."

**THE VOICE OF REASON:** "Expecting people to know what you want without telling them is insane. How about this: Make a list of birthday gifts you want and ask permission to give the list to your significant other. Chances are he'll be relieved, and you may actually get what you want next year."

Here's a crazy idea: What if you started every relationship by creating an agreement about how you will treat each other?

## TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO **WIN** WITH YOU

What if you set the expectation that when someone violates such an agreement—and it's only a matter of time before one of you does—you both not only have the right but are expected to say something?

Then people might just tell each other the truth.

For example, what if when you scheduled an appointment with a vendor who is notoriously late, you told her that promptness is important to you? You tell the vendor that you're looking forward to the meeting, but if she is more than fifteen minutes late, you're going to leave.

Having laid out this expectation, you might feel more justified in walking out at 12:20 when she still hasn't arrived for your twelve o'clock appointment than you would have if you had not set an expectation during your initial conversation.

For those of you who are thinking, "*That may happen to you, but it never happens to me. I would never allow it*," here's another example. Have you ever had lunch with a friend or coworker who repeatedly stiffs you for part of the bill? Every time you go out he pays only for his $10.00 burger, *forgetting* to include tax and tip. Has that person shorted the bill more than once? Did you ever say anything? I'm guessing that instead of speaking up, you begrudgingly threw in a couple of extra dollars, while wondering why you continue to have lunch with the guy.

Instead of subsidizing your cheap friends and coworkers, how about trying something new? What if when sitting down for lunch, everyone at the table agrees to pay his or her fair share? If someone doesn't, each person at the table not only has the right but is expected to say something. "*Okay all you tightwads. We're short $8.00. Pony up for tax and tip. We had a deal.*" And if you want to be a bit more tactful, you could say, "*We're short $8.00. If you didn't add tax and tip, please throw in a couple more dollars.*"

If you make an agreement in advance, you might feel freer speaking up than if you hadn't made that agreement in the first place.

Why do people continue to stiff you on the bill? Why are they always late? Because you allow it.

When there's no permission to speak candidly, you don't. Most of us are afraid of damaging our relationships. So instead of saying what we really think, we suck it up and wait for people who are late and subsidize people who think that tax and tip don't apply to them.

## BEHAVIOR **GUIDELINES**

A few months ago I was speaking at a conference, and two women sitting in the third row talked throughout my entire presentation. The noise drove me nuts. But did I speak to them or confront them? Did I ask them to stop talking? No!

I wanted to say something but I didn't feel that I could—because I hadn't initially requested that the audience refrain from side-talking. If I had asked the two women to stop talking, I would have been criticizing them for something I hadn't asked them not to do. Kind of like getting feedback during a performance appraisal about an issue that no one mentioned to you during the entire year. We all hate that, don't we?

How about asking someone who is texting during a meeting to turn off her phone? When no behavior guidelines are established at the onset of the meeting, how does the facilitator manage participants' behavior?

People feel betrayed when they are called out in these situations, because they're being held to standards they weren't aware of, which makes it impossible for them to win.

You might be thinking these are such common guidelines that they shouldn't even need to be mentioned. Everyone knows we should turn off our phones and not side-talk during presentations. That's true, and yet we break the rules all the time. How many meetings do you attend in which people are stealthily texting under the table, as if no can see what they're doing?

Setting expectations at the beginning of anything new—a meeting, a relationship, or a project—makes it easier to address frustrating behaviors when they happen. And they will happen.

## **PREPARE** FOR THINGS TO GO WRONG

As human beings, we make commitments and then we forget them. How many times have you remembered a meeting only when a reminder popped up in an email? It's why we chose to carry five-pound Franklin planners before replacing them with iPhones and Droids. Our tendency to break commitments is also why personal trainers make a living.

Of course, we don't need someone to watch us warm up on a treadmill and do repetitions. Personal trainers stay in business because without someone expecting us to show up at the gym and charging us if we don't, many of us would sit on our couch watching reruns of bad TV shows.

Rather than expecting people to remember and keep all of their commitments, you're a wise person when you expect that they won't and put what I call a *prevention* in place.

## PREVENTIONS

Preventions take into account that people are human and that human beings make mistakes. Let's say you've made a commitment not to eat sugar. You know that if you buy a pint of your favorite ice cream and put it in your freezer, it will be gone in a few days. So, as a prevention, you don't bring ice cream or other desserts into your house. If you're desperate for a sugar fix you may find yourself driving to the nearest convenience store, but leaving your house is definitely less convenient than walking to your freezer.

Since the day after those two women side-talked throughout my presentation, I've taken a few moments to set expectations at the beginning of every speech, training program, and meeting. I ask people to please silence their phones and not side-talk, email, or text during the presentation. Then I put a prevention in place.

I write the agreements down and post them someplace visible at the beginning of every meeting and presentation. I revisit the agreements before breaks and at the onset of each ensuing session. Keeping agreed-upon behaviors in the forefront makes managing "bad" behavior easier. Instead of being the bad guy and reprimanding people, I am merely reminding them of what they've already agreed to do.

Although I establish my presentation and meeting guidelines and then post them, I know some attendees will still talk to the person next to them and whip out their iPhones. They can't help themselves. So I put a *fallback* in place.

## FALLBACKS

A fallback is a consequence that a group agrees to when people violate agreements. A typical fallback for meetings is for each person who is late to put a dollar in a jar. When the jar is full, the people who were late have funded a happy hour!

When I managed training sessions for a mutual fund company, I would give participants who arrived late to the training sessions the option of putting a dollar into a jar, singing a song, or telling a joke. All of these agreed-upon fallbacks were effective until people started to purposefully arrive late so they could sing! They wanted their moment of stardom. When I realized that the consequence had become a perk, we agreed on a new fallback.

As we all know, relationships are not always smooth. Unless you're hanging out with androids, you will eventually disappoint someone and be disappointed. Setting expectations, putting *preventions* and *fallbacks* in place, and asking for permission to give and receive feedback are examples of deliberately designing your relationships. Regardless of what happens, each person involved in making the agreement has the freedom to talk about violated expectations. Hopefully this will preserve and strengthen your relationships, so you don't wind up fired or so others don't refuse to work with you, with no explanation.

## ASK FOR **CANDOR**

When I was trying to brand my business, the owner of a marketing agency I was considering hiring put a sizable proposal in front of me. I was overwhelmed. The plan was, shall we say, much more robust than I had anticipated. In fact, the cost was a showstopper.

After we learned more about each other's businesses and talked through the elements of the proposal, I said, "Let's talk about money. The cost associated with this proposal overwhelmed me. I'd love to do this work with you, but if I choose to do it, I'll have to go live with my mom."

Despite the fact he had just discovered that I probably couldn't afford to work with him, the owner of the agency looked relieved and said, "Most people dance uncomfortably around the issue of money and never quite get to it. You just threw it out there."

I told him what I tell all the vendors I work with: "I'm really direct. You can say anything to me, and I hope you will. I mean it. Never be worried about something you want or need to say."

So how about trying something new? At the beginning of all of your professional relationships, ask people to be honest with you. Give your boss, coworkers, customers, and vendors permission to say whatever they need to say, and ask for permission to do the same.

## EFFECTIVE BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP LANGUAGE

Consider using the following language when starting business relationships.

### Kicking Off Relationships with Coworkers

> *"I want a good relationship with you. If we work together long enough, I'm sure I'll screw it up. I'll wait too long to reply to an email, make a mistake, or miss a deadline. I'd like the kind of relationship in which we can talk about these things. I always want to know what you think. And I promise that no matter what you tell me, I'll say thank you. Is it okay if I work this way with you?"*

### Kicking Off Relationships with Direct Reports

> *"As your manager, my job is to help you get where you want to go, whether that is within this organization or elsewhere. As a result, I'm going to let you know anything I hear you say or see you do or see you wear that either contributes to your success or gets in the way of it."*

Managers who take the time and make the effort to set expectations build trust, rapport, and relationship—the elements of smooth working relationships.

### Kicking Off Relationships with Direct Supervisors

> *"I'm committed to my professional development, and I'm always looking for growth opportunities. I hope that if you hear me say or see me do or see me wear anything that gets in the way of how I want to be seen, you will tell me. I promise I'll be receptive and say thank you. I also, of course, hope you'll tell me the things I do well that are in line with your expectations."*

Although supervisors don't need permission to give their direct reports feedback, many are hesitant to do so. They don't want to offend or damage a new relationship. Like most people, managers are concerned that if they give negative feedback, they won't be liked or their employees might quit.

You might be thinking, *"It's my boss's job to give me feedback. I shouldn't have to ask for it."* And you're right. Your boss should give you feedback and you shouldn't have to ask for it. But if he doesn't, you're at a huge disadvantage. You may spend massive amounts of time on projects that aren't really important. You may not be given opportunities and never know why. And you may think your performance is strong, only to find out otherwise when you receive a mediocre performance review and a nominal pay increase. So yes, your boss should give you feedback without your having to ask for it. You can be right all day, but your righteousness won't get you any closer to the career or business relationship you want.

## THE SCHOOL OF WHAT WORKS VERSUS
## THE SCHOOL OF WHAT'S RIGHT

When I was twenty-three, I moved to Boulder, Colorado, because the weather is beautiful and it's never humid in Boulder. I landed my first real job there (my parents were very relieved), supporting trainers who taught public seminars all over the country.

The company sent me to Chicago for training on my first day on the job. I was traveling with my new boss, who was only about six months older than I was and, in my opinion, very snooty. One afternoon we were sitting at a red light at a four-way intersection, waiting to turn right. I had just started to turn when a car in the opposing lane made a left turn and cut me off. I instantly hit the brakes.

My boss scowled and said, "Why did you stop? You had the right of way." I replied, "I'd rather be alive than right."

That experience stuck with me much longer than the job. Since that day, I've worked hard to live by the teachings of *the school of what works* as opposed to *the school of what's right*. That means that rather than stand on a principle, I make sure to get what I need.

Yes, your boss should tell you what he wants at the beginning of your relationship and give you feedback when you violate his expectations. But some managers will do that and some won't. If you want to get more detailed feedback than the statement "*meets expectations*" on your performance appraisal, you must know what your boss wants and how he wants it, as well as his perceptions of your performance.

When you tell your boss you want his feedback and promise to take it graciously, you're saying several things. First, you respect him and his opinion. Second, you demonstrate that you care about your career and take your job seriously. Third, you make it easy to give you feedback. Your boss doesn't have to worry that you're going to get defensive.

So be smart and take your performance into your own hands. Regardless of who you work for or what you think of him or her, ask for feedback early in the relationship. Promise to accept his or her response graciously.

Starting relationships by giving permission to give you feedback may feel a little weird. If my sample conversations feel awkward or unrealistic, use whatever language you feel comfortable with. Choose whatever words seem best to you. The important thing is to get out in front of your relationships.

Think about it—has anyone ever overtly given you permission to say whatever you need to say? Or promised that when you do, they'll say thank you? Setting the expectation that you'll give and receive feedback at the beginning of a relationship is so unusual, it immediately sets you apart. Almost no one does this, but everyone wants to work with people who do. Be that person. It's easy and costs absolutely nothing.

As Stephen Covey said in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "You're depositing into the emotional bank account." Although trust can be broken in an instant, it is built over time. Since all long-lasting relationships are built on trust, you're laying the foundation for relationships that survive inevitable miscommunications, violated expectations, and other missteps.

Remember: No matter how hard you try, you *will* make mistakes. If a relationship lasts long enough, at some point you'll take too long to return a call, provide misinformation, or disappoint the other person in another way. Wouldn't you like your boss to tell you when you make a mistake, giving you a chance to make things right before getting that bad review or perhaps being fired?

**SUMMARY:** *GIVE PEOPLE PERMISSION TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH.*

Despite the abundance of training programs on giving and receiving feedback, speaking up in organizations remains difficult, and many people don't do it. We tend to think it's too difficult to confront people. We don't want to deal with the conflict, so we say nothing.

Be smarter. Rather than waiting for something to go wrong, set clear expectations at the beginning of working relationships and projects. Tell your coworkers you want to have a good relationship with them. Make an agreement that when challenges arise, it's not only okay but also expected to discuss what's going on. Agreeing to talk about difficult situations before they happen makes it more likely that when breakdowns occur, you'll be able to speak up with less anxiety.

CHAPTER 13

# DEALING WITH **DIFFICULT** SITUATIONS

Who needs reality TV when you have office drama? If you want to be entertained, just watch some of the crazy things people in your office do. Unfortunately, when you have to deal with these instances of crazy behavior, they're not so entertaining. People do things at work every day that make us want to lock ourselves in a conference room until everyone else has gone home. Coworkers give negative feedback in front of other people, break confidences they swore they'd keep, and linger in our offices for thirty minutes talking about nothing.

## WHAT TO DO
### WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

Time spent setting expectations and establishing working agreements definitely reduces the number of awkward conversations you will need to have. You'll know what people expect of you and vice versa. You won't have to guess what people need or what frustrates them. Missteps and mistakes will be reduced, but they won't be eliminated. Stuff happens. Unless you work alone all the time, you're not exempt from the craziness that ensues at work.

This chapter provides strategies for dealing with some of the most difficult situations that arise in the workplace. One note before we dive in: I wince every time I hear the term "dealing with difficult people." We deal with situations, not people. While some people may be difficult to work with and your world would get instantly better if they would go away, remember that no one wants to be "dealt with."

### SITUATION: No matter what you do, one person remains difficult to work with.

Crazymakers are in every organization, everywhere. These are the people who deliberately stir things up and make things hard. They're the first people you are warned about when you join an organization—the ones whose presence at meetings evokes eye rolling and raised eyebrows.

*Crazymaker* is actually an academic term. If you take a college-level communications class, you will hear it. If you Google it, you will find numerous books written about these seemingly impossible people.

If you've tried everything within your power to work with someone, stop trying so hard. You can't work well with someone who doesn't want to work with you. But I do mean everything. Everything does not mean, *"I sent the person three emails and he didn't respond."* Or, *"I gave him feedback once and he didn't change his behavior. So now I have a pass to work around him."* Three emails and one conversation don't qualify as doing everything you can to get what you need from someone to create a good working relationship.

Everything includes several conversations and asking your boss or others to help broker the relationship. After you've done these things, be professional, courteous, and manage your emotions. If you can't get what you need to get your job done, ask someone to intervene who has a better relationship with that person.

I suspect many managers and organizational leaders would question me for suggesting you stop working on your most difficult working relationships. I'm not saying you should ignore the person or refuse to work with him. Instead, interact as well as you can and as much as you need to in order to do your job, but don't do more than that. Don't invest your time where you will not see a result. That's like trying to date someone who doesn't want to date you. We all know how that turns out.

### SITUATION: You work for someone who doesn't provide enough feedback.

Managers are frequently promoted into management because they're good at their jobs. But doing something well and coaching someone else to do it are not the same thing. If all you hear from your boss is that you're doing a good job, and if you've tried the techniques for getting more feedback as outlined throughout this book and that hasn't worked, get feedback from a different source.

Don't sabotage yourself with the belief that your boss *should* give you feedback, and if he doesn't, it isn't your problem. Or by deciding that if there was negative feedback to give, someone would have told you. Until you hear otherwise, you'll just keep doing what you're doing. You already know people are not inclined to give feedback. No news is not necessarily good news.

If you do something poorly and don't get feedback, you still get a reputation for mediocre performance. People who are committed to their careers get the information they need, no matter what type of manager they work for. Anyone who sees you work may have insight into what you could be doing more effectively.

Simply ask your colleagues for specific feedback, and give coworkers permission to tell you. If the feedback isn't specific enough or you doubt its validity, ask someone else until you either get useful information or can validate the

feedback you're questioning. While you deserve a boss who provides regular and specific feedback, you won't always have one.

## SITUATION: You were promoted and now your former coworkers and friends work for you.

Managing people who were once your peers and are your friends is always awkward. How you handle the transition will determine how long the awkwardness lasts and how much authority and trust you earn with your new direct reports. Trust is earned, not awarded. You want employees who listen to you because they trust and respect you, not because of your title.

I suggest you practice something I call *name the game*, which is simply saying what you feel other people are thinking but will most likely not say. Just because your new direct reports don't tell you how much they wanted your job and how annoyed they are because they didn't get it, or how weird it is to be working for a friend, doesn't mean those feelings don't exist.

When you get promoted above coworkers and friends, I suggest having a one-on-one conversation with each new direct report and say, *"We were peers and friends, and now I'm your boss. It's awkward for me, and I have to assume it's awkward for you as well. I want us to have a good working relationship. The nature of our relationship will have to change. Before we go there, I want to give us both a chance to talk about how we're feeling. Want to start? What's this like for you?"*

These are obviously my words. Choose your own. But I recommend you have the conversation. The more transparent and willing you are to speak candidly about things people are thinking but not saying, the more respect you'll earn and the more solid your relationships will be.

## SITUATION: You manage a team of people who were once your peers. You had the conversation described above with your new direct reports and talked openly about how uncomfortable it is to transition from being peers to a relationship in which you're the supervisor. But months later one of your employees still refuses to accept you as her boss. She won't take direction from you and ignores your feedback.

This is a challenging situation. Use the Feedback Formula outlined in chapter ten to have a candid conversation.

### STEP ONE: Open the conversation.

*"I'd like to talk with you about our working relationship."*

In this instance, skip step two.

### STEP THREE: Share the behavior.

*"Our relationship has been challenging since I started supervising the team. We've had a number of conversations about how much I'd like a good working relationship with you and about your resistance to accepting me as your supervisor."*

### STEP FOUR: State the impact of the behavior.

*"The last time we talked I asked what you needed from me that you were not getting and what I could do to help you feel more comfortable with me as your supervisor. I don't know what else to do. Our relationship has not improved, and your resistance to my direction has become a performance issue. Either you need to accept me as the leader of this team or it's probably time for you to begin applying for other jobs."*

### STEP FIVE: Ask a question. Give the other person a chance to talk.

*"What are your thoughts?"*

**STEP SIX: Make a suggestion or request.**

*"I'd really like to have you on the team, if you change your behavior. If not, let's figure out a transition plan for you."*

You might be gasping, thinking there is no way you could ever have this conversation. It's definitely a tough message. This would not be your first, second, or even third conversation about this employee's resistance. While it's a difficult conversation, if you're in this situation and have the support of your boss and the human resources department, you will need to have it. Consider which is worse—having a short, challenging conversation or working with someone who treats you disrespectfully for months or even years.

## SITUATION: You've given someone the same feedback repeatedly and nothing has changed.

When I do training and speak at conferences, the most frequent complaint I hear is, "I gave feedback, nothing changed, and there is nothing I can do." If you have given someone feedback and she hasn't changed her behavior, then she doesn't want to, can't, or doesn't know how to do what you're asking.

You need to determine why the person has not changed her behavior. If you decide she can do what you're asking and chooses not to, then the consequence of not changing is either nonexistent or not positive or negative enough to motivate behavior change. People change their behavior because of positive and negative consequences. No consequence, no behavior change.

If you feel you don't have the authority to hold someone accountable, I'd question that. You don't have to threaten someone's job, freeze her salary, or prevent her from applying for other roles to motivate different behavior. An effective consequence is addressing the behavior *every* time you see it—not every once in a while, but every single time. No one will enjoy being "talked to" every time she is late, misses a deadline, or wears inappropriate clothing. It's uncomfortable. It's also what we call being "managed out." Eventually, the person will get tired of these conversations and will either change her behavior or find another role, either within the organization or outside it.

## SITUATION: You told someone something in confidence, and it came back to you from someone else.

When someone breaks your confidence, here's what you can do:

**STEP ONE: Introduce the conversation. Explain what you're going to talk about and why.**

*"John, do you have a second? I wanted to talk with you about something I heard."*

In this instance, skip step two.

**STEP THREE: Describe the observed behavior.**

*"I was talking to Sue the other day and she mentioned something that I had told you in confidence. That was between you and me. You gave me your word that you would keep it to yourself."*

**STEP FOUR: Share the impact or result of the behavior.**

*"Hearing things I told you in confidence from other people makes me feel like I can't trust you."*

**STEP FIVE: Have some dialogue. Ask the recipient for his perception of the situation.**

*"What happened?"*

**STEP SIX: Make a suggestion or request for what you'd like the person to do next time.**

*"If I ask you to keep something to yourself, please do so. And if you feel like you can't, please tell me. If you do tell someone, please come tell me. I'd rather hear it from you than someone else."*

**STEP SEVEN: Build an agreement on next steps.**

*"Are you willing to do that?"*

**STEP EIGHT: Say "Thank you."**

*"Thanks for being willing to have this conversation with me. It was hard for me to talk to you about this. But our working relationship matters to me, and I want to feel I can trust you and continue to confide in you."*

## SITUATION: Someone tells you about a problem but asks you not to say anything. Or someone gives you permission to pass the feedback on but doesn't want to be identified as the source of the information.

Being told something in confidence and then asked not to take action puts you in a very awkward position. When this happens, ask the person why he told you. Request that he not do it again unless he wants you to do something with the information.

There are times you simply cannot keep confidences. If this is the case, go back to the person who confided in you and tell her what you're going to do. Don't let her hear about it from someone else. The conversation could go something like this:

*"Mary, I appreciate you telling me about the client's complaint. I know you asked me not to share it, and I want to respect your confidentiality. But it's a big deal and I have to pass on the feedback. How can I share the information so that you're comfortable? Do you want to talk to the director of sales yourself? I'm sure he'll be receptive. Or do you want me to talk to him?"*

Here is another example: Let's say Sue told you something about John and wants you to take action but doesn't want to be identified as the source of the feedback. This too is challenging. The ideal thing to do in this situation is to help Sue plan a conversation with John. If Sue isn't comfortable having the conversation on her own, offer to help her lead the conversation. If she isn't willing to do either of these two things and you think it's important for John to get the feedback, you can deliver it yourself. But this is a last resort.

The conversation with John could go something like this: Give John the feedback. Then say, *"I can't identify the source of this information, and I know that's frustrating. Typically, if I can't share the source, I don't give the feedback. But I think it's important for you to know this.*

*"Here is my suggestion, as difficult as this will be: rather than trying to figure out who said what, just alter your behavior. You might also tell the people with whom you work most closely that you got some feedback on _____and you're working to improve in that area. Tell your coworkers that you would appreciate any feedback they have. Then after you've made some changes, go back to them. Share what you've done differently and ask again for specific feedback."*

## SITUATION: You applied for an internal job but didn't get it. You weren't given any feedback and you want to know why you didn't get the job.

Hiring managers are under no obligation to be candid with external candidates, but they do have a responsibility to help internal candidates grow and develop. Existing employees need and deserve candid feedback. That said, very few managers want to tell candidates why they didn't hire them.

The solution? Ask for the feedback. You may not get it, but you definitely won't if you don't ask. Tell the hiring manager, *"Thank you for the opportunity to interview. I'd really appreciate some feedback about what would have made me a better candidate. Anything you can tell me will be helpful."*

If you don't have access to the hiring manager, ask your boss for help. That could sound something like, *"Bob, I really appreciated the opportunity to interview for the marketing director role. I'd really like to get some feedback on what would have made me a better candidate. What's the best way for me to get that feedback? Would you be comfortable asking the hiring manager on my behalf?"*

## SITUATION: Every time you give feedback to a certain person on your team, she cries.

Giving a crier feedback is uncomfortable. Some people say people cry to manipulate and get out of a situation. I don't think that's true. Rather, I think we all have a natural reaction to feedback and stress. Some of us clam up and say nothing, some of us get angry, and some of us cry. These are all natural reactions.

A person's response to feedback is not your problem. You're responsible for delivering feedback appropriately—behind a closed door, stating just the facts and focusing on behaviors and not emotion. But you are not responsible for how the recipient feels or reacts.

If she cries, hand her a tissue and keep talking. If the person is too emotional to participate in the conversation, end it. Say, *"I can see this is very upsetting and I'm sorry about that. Why don't we finish this conversation another time?"* When the person is calm, resume the conversation.

## SITUATION: You attend a weekly meeting that is so unproductive, you can barely stand it.

Here is one of the most frequent complaints I hear from training participants: "All this candor stuff is nice, but if I don't lead the meeting there's not much I can do. I'm not in a position to tell the vice president, who is three levels above me, how to run his meetings."

Giving feedback to people above us, when we have no formal authority, is a challenge many of us know all too well. But there are a few things you can do. If you have a good relationship with the meeting facilitator, you can approach him and say something like, *"Running meetings of this size (or with this group) is really challenging. I wouldn't want to do it. I came across an article the other day that had some good ideas on how to run meetings like this one. Would you like me to make you a copy? Or would you like to hear a few of the ideas?"*

Or you could say, *"Running meetings of this size (or with this group) is really challenging. I wouldn't want to do it. I came across an article the other day that had some good ideas on how to run meetings like this one. It talked about having a back-up facilitator for when conversations get heated. Having a back-up facilitator allows the primary facilitator to step out and participate in the process, and it gives someone else the responsibility of managing the meeting during that conversation. The article also suggested giving difficult participants (like the people who speak too frequently or say no to everything) a job, like being the scribe. Would you like me to recommend any of these roles during the next meeting? I'm happy to help in any way that I can."*

Express some humility and offer to be helpful, rather than criticize the meeting facilitator, which will likely make him less accepting of your input.

If you feel you can't have this type of conversation with the meeting facilitator, find someone who can. It's likely that another person who attends the meeting has a close enough relationship with the facilitator that he can say something. Or consider who in the organization has the facilitator's ear and can have a conversation more comfortably than you can.

The conversation could go something like, *"Steve, I need to talk to you offline. I know you have a good relationship with Mike, and I was wondering if you could run a little interference. Mike's weekly meetings are really challenging. We talk about the same things repeatedly but never make any decisions. Would you be willing to talk to him about how he could improve the meeting? I don't think the message will be well received from me."*

Yes, my language here is pretty direct. Depending on whom you're speaking with, you may want to tone it down. For example, *"Steve, I need a little help. I've been attending Mike's weekly staff meetings. It's a tough meeting to run. There are several attendees with competing interests. Sometimes the meetings get out of hand. I want to help Mike, but I'm not sure how. You have a good relationship with him. What do you think about talking to him and making some suggestions, or asking if he'd like some help? I'd be happy to co-facilitate or help him add structure to the meeting."*

Everyone in an organization has someone he is close to and whom he confides in. That person can often say things that others can't. If you can find that person and he will protect your confidence while taking action on your behalf, that can be a very effective method of creating change.

## SITUATION: One of your coworkers wants something from you and sends an email with a carbon copy (cc:) list longer than the guest list to your last holiday party.

People misuse the copy and reply-to-all functions on emails because they don't know it's inappropriate or because they don't think they will get what they need from you without alerting the whole world. Someone may be using cc: as a wimpy way to alert your boss or colleagues that you don't make deadlines or meet your commitments. So she includes way too many people on emails hoping it will motivate you to act.

Copying everyone in an email can also be used to mean "I don't know why this email came to me. This is not my job," or "I need Joe's response before I can finish this project" (otherwise known as cover your butt). Again, email misuse could be simple ignorance (not stupidity, mind you; they're not the same thing), a case of not realizing that the whole world doesn't need the minute details.

If someone is inappropriately using cc: or reply-to-all and it bothers you, simply approach the person, state your observation, and ask a question.

**STEP ONE: Introduce the conversation. Explain what you're going to talk about and why.**

*"Joan, do you have a second?"*

**STEP TWO: If the conversation is not awkward or difficult, skip step two (empathize) and go directly to step three.**

**STEP THREE: Describe the observed behavior.**

*"I've noticed that when you need something from me you often copy the entire team in your email response."*

**STEP FOUR: Describe the impact of the behavior.**

*"This is embarrassing and makes me feel you don't trust me."*

**STEP FIVE: Have some dialogue. Ask the recipient for her perception of the situation.**

*"I'm wondering why you do that."*

If she says, *"The whole team needs that information. I'm just keeping people in the loop,"* you can reply with something like:

*"I don't think the whole team needs to have that much detail. But let's add it as a topic to our next meeting agenda. We can talk about how much information people would like as projects progress and then make a decision as a team."*

If instead she says, *"It's hard to get information from you. Sometimes I feel like the only way you get back to me is if other people are included on the message,"* you could use step six to form your reply.

**STEP SIX: Request what you'd like the person to do next time.**

*"I'm sorry you feel that way. Would you be willing to speak to me directly the next time you request something and feel I haven't responded quickly enough? I'm very open to feedback, and I promise to be receptive."*

This is an opportune time to use the Candor Questions provided in chapter three to talk about working-style preferences and setting expectations. You and Joan may have different definitions of what it means to respond in a timely way. For Joan, a timely response may be within two hours of receipt. For you, it may mean by the end of the week. Don't assume that you and Joan have the same preferences.

The conversation could go something like this:

*"Joan, I'm realizing that when we started working together we never talked about our working-style preferences—our preferred method of communication, desired response time, how we will handle questions, and so forth. I think it would be really useful for us to have this conversation. What do you think? Would you like to do that now or schedule another time?"*

## SITUATION: Your boss tells you she is open to feedback, but when you give it, she gets defensive.

Giving anyone feedback is hard, but it's especially difficult to give it to your boss.

Feedback doesn't have to start with "*I disagree*," an opening that puts most people on the defensive. Asking a question can be an effective way to start to give feedback.

First say, *"The decision on _____ was really interesting."*

Then, when you want to share a counter point of view, ask one or two of the following questions.

Can you walk me through how this decision was made? Or, what was the rationale for this decision?
Where did this idea come from?
I wonder what the outcome will be.
One of our competitors did that last year. I wonder what kind of results they saw.
What does Bob think of the idea?

No one likes to be told that she's wrong. There are lots of ways to disagree without actually saying you disagree. Open-ended questions open the door to a conversation when the questions are asked to genuinely understand something, rather than to accuse or make someone else appear wrong.

## SITUATION: Your boss doesn't make time to meet with you. She cancels meetings. You can't move forward on projects without her input. As a result, your projects are running behind schedule.

Most managers are functional managers, which means that, in addition to managing people, they have their own accountabilities. Because they're so busy or may underestimate the importance of meeting individually with direct reports, many managers think team meetings or swinging by their employees' desks can replace traditional one-on-one meetings.

Conversations that occur naturally throughout the day do not replace scheduled one-on-one meetings. Every employee needs face time with his manager, whether he likes the manager or not. Short weekly or semi-monthly one-on-one meetings are ideal.

When it's hard to get time with your manager, tell her you know how busy she is and that you need her input to get things done. You'll also need permission to schedule meetings and to reschedule them when she cancels. Ask her assistant for help, if she has one. Her assistant will know the days when you're likely to be able to grab your boss for a few minutes and which appointments on her calendar are "real" or are blocked out for travel or focus time.

If you haven't already done so, ask your manager the best way to communicate with her—email or voicemail and office phone or cell. Ask if there is someone else who can sign off on work when she is unavailable. Suggest phone meetings during her daily commute or while she's traveling. Meetings don't need to be in person, nor do they need to be long. A lot can get done in fifteen minutes.

If none of these strategies work, consider moving forward with projects anyway. Use your boss's preferred communication method—email or voicemail—to send work-in-progress and status updates. Ask her to let you know if she wants you to do something differently.

## SUMMARY: *YOU CAN SAY MORE THAN YOU THINK YOU CAN.*

Working with other people will always be challenging. When you get a group of people together who need to accomplish goals with limited resources and time, it's natural for conflict, power struggles, and territorialism to ensue. It's just the nature of working in an organization.

I encourage you to speak up and make requests. You can say more than you think you can, especially when your intention is to strengthen a relationship and improve results. If you wait too long to address an issue or say things you wish you hadn't, you can always clean it up.

Apologizing for how you managed something goes a long way and does not retract or invalidate your message. Suffering is optional. You'll feel better when you say what you need to say.