



Excuses Managers Give for Avoiding Criticism

By Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

Here are the most common excuses why managers avoid giving criticism to their employees: #1 *“If I wait long enough, the situation will probably resolve itself so that I won’t have to get involved.”* When I poll managers I find that almost every manager has waited in hopes that a bad employee situation would resolve itself. When I ask for how many of them did the situation resolve itself – I find that it is typically less than 3 percent. Avoiding the situation may be appropriate when the issue is trivial or if the problem is symptomatic of more pressing problems. However, ignoring a situation is inappropriate most of the time because most problems do not go away on their own. The problem with waiting is that often times we wait too long and then we worry that we will blow up and mishandle the situation.

#2 *“I criticize indirectly by using sarcasm or jokes.”* Many of you are familiar with Mehrabium’s research, which indicates that 93 percent of how we communicate is by our nonverbal behavior. When an employee comes in late, do you comment loudly enough for all to hear, “Does your watch say 8:15 or is that just my watch?” Why do managers think that strategy is effective? Sharon shows up 15 minutes late all the time and the fact that the manager tries to embarrass her in front of others is not direct nor effective in getting Sharon to show up to work on time.

Worse yet, during the weekly staff meeting, the manager puts tardiness as an item on the agenda. The manager makes an announcement to everyone that the start time is indeed 8:00 a.m. Tardy Sharon is sitting in that staff meeting thinking to herself, “Whew, I must not be the only one who is having trouble getting to work on time.” The rest of the staff is thinking to themselves, “Hmm, the boss is yelling at us but its just Sharon who is late! I can’t believe the boss is yelling at the entire group.” It’s indirect and unfair to your timely employees to raise the tardiness issue when it is just a problem with Sharon.

Recognize that when it comes to tardiness issues, there are two different types of employees. You have an employee who is late and immediately comes to you and says, “Charlie, I know I’m 10 minutes late, I ran into a traffic jam.” Charlie, the manager, is not going to talk to this employee about being late because the employee was proactive in admitting their problem.

You do, however, need to worry about the second employee who’s late 15 or 20 minutes. They come sneaking in and quickly get to their office without acknowledging that being late is a problem. They know they are late and their goal is to try and get away with it. These are the employees you must confront and deal with immediately or they will develop poor work habits.

#3 *“It takes too much time to criticize effectively, I’d rather pick up the slack than take the time to correct another’s behavior.”* Many supervisors have this attitude. After all, their job entails working on projects or working a line as well as supervising. It’s easy for them to fall in to the trap of picking up the slack rather than correcting an employee’s behavior. Once again, this is short-term, micromanager thinking.

I learned this strategy when I was ten or eleven years old. My father is a perfectionist. I figured out that if I didn’t take the trash out the exact way my dad wanted me to, he would inevitably never ask me to do the trash again. I also knew that he could count on my sister Kathy to do it correctly. For several weeks, I didn’t take out the trash according to my dad’s liking. And I was right, my dad began asking Kathy instead, “Kathy, you do such a good job taking out the trash, why don’t you help me?” Bingo. I didn’t have to work as hard or as often. I learned that when I was ten. -Your employees know that about you right now. They figured out that you will pick up the slack if necessary. You’ll do what you need to do to make it right. Don’t. If they’re not doing it right, take the time to correct their behavior or re-train them. If you continue to pick up the slack, your employees will never have to learn how to work.

Excerpted from Patti Hathaway’s book, *Secrets for Unleashing Employee Greatness: The Step-by-Step System to Maximize Every Employee’s Greatness*, 2005. *Patti Hathaway, CSP, The CHANGE AGENT, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.*