



Where Listening and  
Learning Embrace

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## ***Management in Action***

### Sensitivity- The anti-harassment weapon

I worked for a company that had what they termed harassment training (Shouldn't that be anti-harassment?). At the two sessions I attended, several managers felt they didn't need it. But a little sensitivity goes a long way.

Following is a situation that actually occurred (names have been changed) relating to sexual harassment. How would you have managed the following situation?

- A supervisor (George) contacts a manager (Fred) to let him know that an employee (Sheila) has come to him complaining she's being sexually harassed by the man (Al) who delivers the mail.

First, Fred asked George if he had experience with this type of issue. Since he did not, Fred went to the area to manage it. He asked if George would be comfortable observing the resolution and was pleased to see that George was very willing to learn. Then Fred asked Sheila to come in. Fred stated he'd like to hear what happened but first, he explained that the supervisor was there to observe and asked if Sheila felt comfortable with that. She was fine with it.

Fred wanted to accomplish four things in the meeting with Sheila.

1. To make sure she understood this situation would be taken very seriously,
2. To non judgmentally clarify exactly what occurred
3. To discover what behavior bothered Sheila
4. To find out what she wanted done

After Fred assured Sheila that this issue would be thoroughly dealt with he asked her what happened. Sheila said that Al hung around her desk when he delivered the mail and persistently asked her out. This was not done in a hostile manner. However, Sheila felt very uncomfortable with his attention. She didn't want to confront him but wanted the behavior to stop. She also didn't want to make trouble for the employee.

After carefully listening to Sheila, Fred suggested to Sheila the approach he thought might be best. He said he'd contact the manager of mail services, explain the situation and ask him to talk to Al. This would be done with the right touch- so that the mail services employee would stop the behavior but that he wouldn't be fired or disciplined. Sheila was ok with that approach.

Fred also indicated that when it was all done he would meet with her again.



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Fred contacted Don, the mail services manager, and carefully explained the situation. Don said Al was a good employee and expressed surprise that Al would in any way be bothering anyone but acknowledged this was a serious situation. He would speak with Al immediately and get back with Fred.

Don called in about a half hour and said he spoke with Al. Don said Al was completely shocked that his behavior was interpreted that way and would stop doing it.

Fred then went back to Sheila and told her what happened. She was very relieved. Fred also suggested that if she had any difficulties in the future, to please contact him.

This entire process took about an hour from the complaint to resolution.

Each participant in this little work place drama showed sensitivity:

- Sheila- by not wanting the mail person to lose his job,
- George- by knowing enough to make this a learning experience and knowing enough not to take charge
- Fred- by making sure the employee was heard and handling the resolution with just the right touch
- Don- by taking the complaint seriously and handling his employee with just the right touch
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- Al- by agreeing to stop the offending behavior immediately

Plus, action was taken quickly and decisively making it even clearer to Shelia that her situation was being taken seriously.

In these cases, a tendency might be to be too judgemental. “Oh, what’s she complaining about? The guy hasn’t done anything,” or “That guy should be fired for bothering her.” It seems to me that the best approach is to suspend judgment and work secure in the knowledge that it’s a real issue to the employee. They neither need nor want a manager to judge their feelings- just to acknowledge them and act upon them if necessary.

We each interpret events through our own unique view. It’s the manager’s task to be sensitive to each and every vista.

Steve Wyrstek, President  
Gentle Ears, Inc.  
541 N. 5th Ave.  
Des Plaines, IL 60016  
Direct: 847-803-6991  
FAX: 847-299-8070  
[steve@gentleears.com](mailto:steve@gentleears.com)  
<http://www.gentleears.com>