

Managing Challenging Behavior – A Systematic Approach

As Health Educator Supervisor you are working with a team of diverse educators. As the team leader it is your responsibility to address and handle challenging behavior. It is not acceptable anymore to look the other way and avoid the conflict, since it will impact your team's work and health.

Challenging behaviors can take many forms. Below are a few examples of behavior that can interfere with your team's productivity.

Slacking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They don't volunteer when help is needed; productivity low• Negatively impacts team morale
Coasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experienced in their role but have lost their spark• May be bored or feel defeated
Habitually late	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low productivity• Irritate timely employees; may impact everybody's timeliness
Busy but not productive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show signs of business, may stay late; low productivity• Usually poor planning/ time management
Clingy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask lots of questions, disrupt your work• Reasons may be lack of skills, low self-esteem, desire to be near the leader

For supervisors, it is helpful to be prepared and have a strategy for how to handle dilemmas like these. Let's take a look at a systematic approach or process of handling challenging behavior. This approach includes 4 steps:



Observe

It can be very easy to observe an unproductive behavior but not understand the context that created it at all. It's also important to realize that a difficult behavior does not mean you are looking at a difficult person. A difficult person is one whose behavior consistently impacts the team and/or productivity in a negative way. Observe the person's behavior over time. You are looking for a pattern, not one incident. Everybody can be difficult once in a while.

Gather data

What exactly is going on, and what might explain the behavior? Gather information about the staff member's work performance both from other relevant observers (colleagues, teachers if implementing in schools) and directly from the staff member. Review actual work products such as submissions to the ORS.

Since your perceptions may not be accurate, it is useful to have confidential conversation with co-workers. This way you can assess whether your perceptions match those of others.

Intervene

There are two ways to intervene and address the behavior – informal and formal. Informal refers to an intervention that is a casual but needed conversation, not involving paperwork or other formalities. If the challenging behavior is modest and does not create a major problem or hurdle, an informal intervention is generally recommended. A formal intervention is needed if the behavior harms the team or project. It is usually guided by organizational policies and practices, and involves a consequence if the behavior does not change.

Often the first intervention is informal. The goal is not really to address the behavior right away. The goal is to understand the educator's behavior, to touch base and inquire how they are doing. Often the staff member is not be aware of their difficult behavior. You might casually mention that they seem bothered or a little off. That sometimes is enough to send a signal and puts the difficult behavior back in check. If the behavior is not quickly corrected, you will have to be more specific about the behavior you have observed.

Monitor and follow up

The final step is to monitor the staff member and follow up as needed. Depending on the type of behavior that started the process, there might be several appropriate ways to monitor the situation, including observation, reviewing work, confidentially speaking to co-workers or other observers, quick check-ins, or scheduled meetings to check on progress made. The goal is to ensure that your staff member is genuinely trying to deal with the behavior in question. Don't be overly intrusive; remain positive. You are not trying to catch them being difficult. You are trying to help them be more productive.

Keep in mind that this model is just a general template. Depending the circumstances you may not want to follow every single step.