

Thoughts On Leadership

The following excerpt by Ron McMillan, author of three bestselling books, *Influencer*, *Crucial Conversations*, and *Crucial Confrontations*, was published in the February, 2010 issue of *Leadership Excellence*, a magazine of leadership development, managerial effectiveness and organizational productivity.

Difficult Employees

How can you work with them?

Recently I received this letter: When I assumed my current job, I inherited an employee who has a long history of bad behavior such as being rude, stirring up trouble, and refusing to work with coworkers as a team player. How do I confront this person when the department has played into his behavior for years?

I recommend your first conversation with this person not be a shakedown or a 'you'd better be careful—I'm watching you!' speech. Rather, you might extend a sincere handshake, followed by friendly introductions.

Next, orient your employees to your leadership style and expectations. Even before exploring duties or concerns, explain the operating values and principles of the team and your expectations of team members. Everyone needs to be clear about the team values and operating principles. Explain that members are responsible to produce results but in a way that strengthens the team.

Give examples of what is acceptable behavior and what is out of bounds. Set clear expectations and give everyone a chance for a new start—independent from past patterns and personality conflicts.

You then become a teacher and coach. This requires gathering data through contact with and observation of the employee.

For example, you might say: 'Brent, I noticed when Alice asked for ideas about her project, you gave several helpful suggestions. That is a great example of our team value of collaboration. Your input helped Alice and helped to build a stronger team. Thank you.'

Similarly, when you see behavior that violates team values, confront it as soon as possible.

This approach helps most people to improve their behavior and relationships—and improves team results. It's not a way of controlling or manipulating others, but a way to respectfully help them. Ultimately, it's the individual's choice to be a part of the team you lead—and that's as it should be.