

DO NOT ALLOW PEOPLE TO PLAY THE GAME OF "HE SAID, SHE SAID"

DEALING WITH EMPLOYEES COMPLAINTS AGAINST EACH OTHER IS A TRICKY HR PROBLEM. HERE IS A SIMPLE WAY YOU CAN DEAL WITH THE SITUATION EFFECTIVELY AND INCREASE WORKPLACE HARMONY.

3 MINS READING TIME

DO NOT ALLOW PEOPLE TO PLAY THE GAME OF "HE SAID, SHE SAID"

Imagine a situation where an employee has come into your office to complain about something. It is common enough HR situation. After all, the largest part of most Managers role is solving problems, removing barriers and enabling people to do their job effectively. Many employee gripes are relatively straightforward to deal with. Things like equipment not working, problems with meeting deadlines, information needed and so on.

However, there is one class of HR problem that is a potential minefield. It is when one employee complains about another employee. Often it will be the case that there is a simple disagreement between them and they will have their own viewpoints. Sometimes there will be a clash of personalities and they do not get on generally. Sometimes it is a one off incident. Whatever the history there is a chance that it could get messy.

HE SAID

Whatever happened, one of them has decided to come to you to complain. This, in itself, is interesting because the complainer may be calculating that there is advantage in being the first to complain. After all isn't this one of the strategies used by small children? Imagine that Little Johnny and Jackie are having a disagreement over a ball:

Johnny "Daddy, Jackie won't give me my ball." Daddy "Jackie, give Johnny his ball back."

I call the above exchange 'He Said'. In this case it is 'Johnny said'.

If you are a parent, you will have done exactly this at some time. If you are a Manager you will have also done exactly this. Go on admit it, we have all done this at some time. New Managers, are especially vulnerable to doing this. After all it is quick, it is decisive and it appears to solve the problem.

One of the biggest drawbacks with this solution is that it teaches everyone that the person who complains fastest will always win. So, in effect Daddy has created a situation where Johnny and Jackie will learn to complain and learn to complain first. Because, by complaining first, they will win.

Nobody want to become the sort of manager that has to deal with this situation in this way. It would have a corrosive effect on other members of the workforce who witness the exchange. It is also very tiring for you and not very effective in the long run. Fortunately most parents and managers realize this quickly.

HE SAID, SHE SAID

So, let's look at handling the situation better. Again, let's bring Little Johnny and Jackie back:

Johnny "Daddy, Jackie won't give me my ball." Johnny leaves and Jackie enters Jackie "Daddy, it's my turn to play with the ball."

As a Manager, this is more likely to be what happens in real life. One employee will come to you and talk. There will be some discussion and questioning. Then the second employee will come and talk, Followed by some discussion and questioning. Usually a decision is then made.

I call the above exchange 'He Said, She Said'. In this case it is 'Johnny Said' then 'Jackie Said'.

This is better but it still not great. Sometimes there will be a clear solution. However, generally there is not. In many ways this is akin to being in the role of referee.

A BETTER WAY

So let's look at handling the situation even better. Let's bring Little Johnny and Jackie back:

Johnny "Daddy, Jackie won't give me my ball." Johnny leaves and Jackie enters Jackie "Daddy, it's my turn to play with the ball." Johnny enters the room again Daddy "Johnny tell Jackie what you just told me" Daddy "Jackie tell Johnny what you just told me"

In this scenario each person is given responsibility for the consequences of their story. When approached like this it is my experience that each protagonist will often change the way they present their story. Sometimes they will change their story in subtle ways, sometimes the change is considerable. However people almost always use more conciliatory language.

SOME GOLDEN RULES:

1. Keep the initial exchanges brief and to the point. If either employee is going off track then bring them back gently but firmly. You need to address the issue at hand.
2. If there are deeper underlying issues they need addressing later. By all means schedule in some time to solve any deeper issues, but not now.
3. Let the 2 protagonists speak openly and for a similar duration. Don't use a stopwatch, but don't let either of them grandstand.
4. When the first employee has finished making their complaint and leaves, NEVER ask them to send in the second employee. ALWAYS do this yourself and do it personally. You do not want any perception of favour and it is more polite.

In this situation, you are not the referee, you are the mediator. It is my experience that solutions to differences are found much quicker and are better solutions. The big benefit though is workplace harmony. Everybody comes to learn what to expect and Johnny and Jackie often arrive at solutions before they come to you.

Thank You Jozef for letting us use your lovely photograph.

Thank you for downloading this article. We have other articles on our website. Plus White Papers, Policies, Forms and Utilities that are free for you to download.

Reduce your manual admin and paperwork. Centralise your employee data and processes and reduce your compliance risks and legal stress. Reduce the time spent in managing employee data and free up time to concentrate on strategy, growth and profit.

HR Complete Manager is available in 3 different license bundles: Owner/Manager, Growing Teams and Corporate versions. There is a version to suit all businesses

HRCompleteManager.com