

Raising Sensitive Issues

Scenario: Phil is a relatively new sales representative and Eileen is his sales manager. She's been going out on some of his sales calls recently to observe how he's doing. Eileen has not been satisfied with the presentations she's seen him make, noticing that after he's done, the customers often have many basic questions that he should have answered in his presentation. Eileen decides she needs to bring this to Phil's attention. How should she approach this?

1. Agree to have a meeting.

- Is now a good time? If not, then when?

2. Identify issue

- Do it as objectively and in as 'yin' a way as you can. Goal is to get changed behavior, not to vent your frustration or disappointment.

3. Ask questions.

- Goal is to understand his/her point of view on the issue or what extenuating circumstances might have caused the problem
- Hear him/her out: don't argue with him or dispute his interpretations.

4. Look for areas to agree

5. Then show where you disagree.

6. If you get his acceptance of the criticism, then agree on a solution/action plan.

Responding to Criticism

Scenario: in the above situation, Eileen approaches Phil like this:

“Phil, I know you are hypersensitive about criticism, but you’re just not doing your best when you give presentations. Don’t get defensive, okay? I’m telling you this for your own good. You have a tendency to do things without preparing much. When the customers have to ask so many questions, it looks like we haven’t thought through our solution to their business needs.” How do you respond?

1. Don’t react defensively

This is the hardest step because in situations that surprise us, we often find ourselves reacting before even think about how we want to manage the situation. This is a significant challenge to one’s emotional intelligence

2. Understand the problem

- Active listening
- Ask for details

3. Look for places to agree.

- Agree with facts
- If you disagree with interpretation of those facts, try to show how you can understand that their interpretation is understandable or plausible.

4. Either Accept the validity of the criticism or state how you see it differently

- If you agree, look for a concrete solution that you both think will solve the problem
- If you don’t agree, state why. Are there missing facts? Is there an alternative interpretation of the facts?