

A quick nudge in the right direction can resolve conflicts, argues John Crawley

I'LL MEET YOU HALF WAY

Workplace problems often generate strong feelings and can easily degenerate into entrenched positions. But it is possible to act early and prevent such difficult situations becoming irrecoverable.

As a business involved solely in dispute resolution, CMP Resolutions has been using 'nudge' techniques for some time. Small, purposeful steps can influence people to make better choices about their health. The nudging concept is popular in government circles and there is even a 'nudge unit' in the cabinet office.

CMP has found that nudging can be used to resolve difficult work situations by encouraging people to recognise a problem at the outset, analyse its components and use special techniques to effect a solution. In this context, nudging involves three stages: scoping, reflecting and shaping.

Scoping conflicts involves taking the time to understand what is happening, the perspectives of the people concerned, establishing what is important for them and exploring how the parties can work together to find a solution.

Nudging techniques

- ▶ Set a positive, honest tone.
- ▶ Use empathy: 'I am sorry you felt like that' or 'I understand how you feel'.
- ▶ Clarify the ground rules such as confidentiality and who makes decisions.
- ▶ Manage difficult behaviour firmly but calmly: 'I need you to tell me what happened, not what you think of X.'
- ▶ Create a joint resolution objective: 'I am keen to resolve this directly with you.'
- ▶ Check the reality: 'That is not possible, but this is.'
- ▶ Follow with an action plan.



GETTY IMAGES

The second behavioural nudge involves reflection and letting people know that you appreciate the depth of their feelings and the possible avenues for resolution.

Equipped with this information, the difficult conversation can now be nudged into shape to match what you now know so that the situation can be resolved by dialogue (see box).

Problem solver

A newly qualified nurse for example, is feeling beleaguered and put upon by team mates because of recent shift changes. She grumbles to you and the team that the changes disadvantage her in particular and she seems to be seeking allies.

Working through the nudging techniques summarised in the box, put your frustration at the grumbling to one side, avoid branding or judging the behaviour, and act.

Speedily set up a private meeting, thank her for the feedback, check what the core problem is, reflect her distress and summarise mutual concerns.

Using joint problem solving, find a mutually acceptable solution – 'So what can you and I do to improve the situation?'

Use empathy to move on – 'I can understand how you felt the way you did', or 'I agree that must have been difficult for you', or 'I am sorry you felt like that'. Negotiate a way of involving the team in the process and agree key actions for the team and the novice nurse including: 'Is there one thing you could do to let people know in advance if you feel this way again?'

Most workplace conflicts can be resolved at an early stage by using a simple nudging approach. But always take advice from the human resources department or union if a conflict looks like turning into a more serious situation **NS**

John Crawley is chair of CMP Resolutions

RESOURCE FILE

MindTools: conflict resolution
<http://tinyurl.com/nafwad>
Conflict resolution skills
www.helpguide.org/mental/eq8_conflict_resolution.htm