

Handling poor performance/ unacceptable behaviour

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Purpose

Addressing issues of poor performance or unacceptable behaviour is a much needed but often avoided part of managerial competence, so clients are very grateful for this tool. DESC, borrowed from assertiveness training, is for planning how to raise these issues. It can be useful for new managers, through to senior managers for whom interpersonal skills were less important earlier in their careers. It can be used flexibly, from stopping poor performance early on to a serious pre-discipline situation and with colleagues, subordinates and others in raising other difficult issues. The variation is in the delivery; the DESC planning remains the same.

Description

The exercise simply works through planning the four stages of DESC, as described below. The exercise brings clarity about the issue to be raised and builds confidence in raising it. Planning can be followed by practising the delivery.

Process

- 1 Outline DESC, using an example, for example a subordinate being late.
 - **D**escribe the behaviour – what they are doing, not what

they are. (*I've noticed that you've been late arriving on several occasions lately.*)

- **E**xplain the effects – on you/other relevant people, including feelings if useful. (*This means that opening the post has had to be done by your colleagues, putting their work back and it's beginning to cause bad feelings in the team.*)
- **S**tate what you need them to change. (*I really need you to be getting in on time.*)
- **C**onsequences for them: good if the behaviour does change (*And then you will be able to do the post as you should and team feelings will be restored.*); bad if the behaviour does not change (*I will have to move to a formal warning if it continues.*)

2 Work through DESC with your client, using their situation. Points to be clear on:

- **D** is best expressed in 'I' form.
- The **S** needs to tie in with the **D**. The behaviour you are addressing does not change halfway through. Clarity is key, as they will only have the receiver's attention for a short time.
- **C** is planned to give confidence that it is worth raising the issue. For example, if it is inconsequential (I, the manager, will feel better!), it's not worth raising it.

3 Coaching on what to say and how to say it:

- Using an 'adult-to-adult' style/non-verbal behaviour.
- Where to stop to effectively move the situation forward: for example, often after the **D** and **E**, then seek reactions (*I'm wondering what's changed to suddenly make this happen*). Sometimes just raising the **D** is enough for the person to realise that they have to change.
- How hard to push for change: for example, if the situation has been raised several times, it becomes appropriate to include **C** straight away and/or to use the technique of 'action replay' to repeat the required change in **S**.

Role playing the scenario with feedback can help the client check out delivery, particularly clarity, adult-to-adult

interpersonal style and how the conversation may go forward.

Pitfalls

None. There are no guarantees, but it increases the likelihood of success significantly.

Bibliography

Bower, S. A. and Bower, G. H. (2004) *Asserting Yourself: A Practical Guide for Positive Change*, Jackson, TN: Perseus.