

Confrontation: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly—Part 2

In Part 1, I defined The Good, The Bad and The Ugly of confrontation. In brief review, 'The Good' is when we willingly confront issues needing confronting, remembering to confront the PROBLEM, not the person. Below, I discuss how to recognize and deal with various defense mechanisms.

Getting angry, huffy, indignant. "I can't believe you're talking to me like that;" "I am too angry to talk to you right now;" or the like. **Response:** This person is trying to turn it into a personal confrontation. Don't fall for it. Calmly remind the person that "there exists a problem that you are involved in. Furthermore, the problem must be resolved and for that to happen we must talk about it. If you cannot discuss it now this meeting is over/must be rescheduled, etc."

Crying. Crying stops most leaders in their tracks. **Response:** Cool, smiling, knowing, patience. Don't forget, this person has become an expert on how and when to cry to rescue them from confronting problems. Simply do not play the game. Wait it out, hand over a Kleenex, smile if appropriate, sit calmly until the crying ends. If it goes on a long time simply say "take as much time as you need to get yourself together" sending the message you can wait longer than they can cry. You will likely cure this person of using this tactic (with you) ever again.

Redirecting blame back to you. "I know I was late but I have seen you rush in the parking lot with five minutes to go" **Response:** Calmly say, "no argument,

however this discussion is not about me, it is about the problem as stated and your involvement in the problem. Assuming a successful resolution I will be happy to schedule another time to talk about valid concerns you may have."

Diverting blame on another. "Well, John has been late many times before." **Response:** Calmly explain that "this discussion is not about John, it is about the problem and your involvement and I would like to resolve this problem before we address another topic."

Soliciting pity, sympathy. "You just don't understand, my life is crap"; "I was abused as a child." **Response:** Express "how sad and unfortunate that is however the sadness does nothing to resolve the problem that we need to resolve. At another, appropriate time I'd be happy to sit down and chat about your other problems."

Pointing out how great other people think s/he is. (For instance, as a well-thinked letter of appreciation from a client just before an appointment to confront a problem)! **Response:** Address the problem as usual. Point out that "in our company, a strength in one area is a wonderful thing and appreciated but it does not compensate for a weakness in character nor does it resolve the problem at hand."

Changing the subject. Can be subtle. **Response:** First, recognize it. Then, calmly, simply, reply, "I'd like to get back to the problem at hand and your involvement." Be consistent in this and you will quickly break the habit. Fail to do it and you will be lead around by the nose.

Avoidance of appointments (always with great excuses). This can go as far as avoiding walking by your office or even learning your schedule and avoiding crossing paths. This habit can be very subtle and escalate if you let it. **Response:** Recognize it is happening early in the game rather than later. Get to the heart of this issue fast. Corner the person and ask "are you aware that you are avoiding me? No? Well, it is very clear to me." Do NOT get sucked into offering examples if asked, as the person will likely argue each point. Instead, confidently suggest to the person how apparent their behavior is and ask them to observe their own behavior in the future. Also, make sure you speak clearly about the kind of communication you need, "Let me describe to you the type of communication we need in our company. When I ask for a meeting...".

Heaping compliments on you to divert attention from poor performance. Those having this habit also tend to have cycles of good performance countered with cycles of poor performance. Observe the pattern and recognize when it is happening. It can actually clue you to a problem before you know there is a problem. **Response:** First, ignore the compliments and deal with the problem and the person's involvement. Assuming the first problem gets resolved, at a later moment go a step further and discuss the second problem—the person's habit: "are you aware that during bouts of poor performance that you tend to pass out compliments to preempt negative consequences?" ✖