

HANDLE WITH CARE

There are five phrases you should not say to someone who is angry

CONFLICT at work has always been a problem. Whether you are concerned about violence in the workplace, want to help reduce tension and improve morale at work or just do not want to be part of the problem, learning to avoid these five phrases when people are angry can help resolve problems before they escalate.

'Calm down!'

You see someone angry, upset or in a heightened emotional state. Before you can even think, the words just naturally slide out: "Calm down!"

As natural as this phrase may seem when dealing with an employee (or anyone) who is upset and emotional, it is not an appropriate phrase for helping the individual to calm down.

This is because instead of calming down, the person often becomes more upset. This happens because the phrase insinuates that the person has no legitimate reason to be upset or emotional.

He will now spend more time defending his reason for being upset in the first place, which just amplifies his frustration or anger.

Instead, try phrases like, "I see you're upset, is there anything I can do to help?"

Remember, conflicts are never resolved when the person is still upset.

'What do you want me to do about it?'

First, this is one of the biggest cop-outs. It immediately says: "I'm not going to help you" and "It's not my problem."

But there is another part to this. It communicates "I don't care" or, even worse, "You're being unreasonable in expecting me to help you".

The phrase immediately discredits you both as a responsible person and as an ally.



Conflict at work has always been a problem. - Bloombergpic

Instead, try phrases like, "How can I help?" or "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Help the angry person solve the problem, and if you are in any way to blame for what happened, apologise.

Just don't sound like a telephone customer service representative who parrots: "I'm sorry for any inconvenience that this may have caused you ..."

'Grow up!' or 'Be rational!'

"Grow up" and "Be rational" have the same effect as saying, "Stop acting so childish" and "You're an idiot".

Regardless of whether you think this is true or not, it will do nothing to help resolve the matter at hand. This is like an invitation for more conflict.

You must remember that, at that moment, the person feels justified in

his response, and calling him "childish" will just inflame the situation even more.

Plus, what is the chance of this person responding by saying, "I know, I'm acting like a complete moron but I was wronged!"

Instead, try saying in a concerned voice: "Are you OK? Is there anything I can do to help?" or "What's wrong?"

These phrases will help pacify the person's emotions, allowing him to settle down.

'What's your problem?'

This phrase --- usually accompanied by an offensive tone, a facial expression that screams "disdain" towards the other person and an emphasis on the word "your" --- immediately sets up a "me versus you" dynamic.

The other problem is that this phrase points to the person as the source of whatever is wrong, which almost always leads to that person feeling the need to defend himself.

Instead, try using, "What's wrong?" or "What's the matter?"

These phrases communicate empathy and concern and will help the person begin to deal with the problem without provoking him.

'But ...'

For the love of all that is good, do not follow any of the above-mentioned phrases with "but".

It negates the previous statement, causing people to both disregard the previous statement and to interpret whatever is coming next as negative.

Substituting "and" for "but" will make you much more effective.

If you can learn to use these phrases while looking people in the eye with a calm expression and a disarming tone --- and keep "but" out of harm's way --- you can effectively cool people down when things get hot.

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