

The Six Biggest Discipline Mistakes Leaders Make



*and Five “Best Practices” for
Avoiding Them*

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When you accept the title of leader, manager, supervisor, or any other title that puts you in charge of a group of people, you also accept the responsibility of providing feedback to those people.

Great leaders accept this and take steps to learn to do it well. Cowardly leaders find all types of ways to avoid dealing with discipline issues with methods that allow them to fool themselves into thinking they've done their jobs.

Here are the top six ways cowardly leaders avoid providing true discipline.

1. The "Overhead Lob" Approach

This method is used when a leader doesn't want to, or doesn't know how to confront the employee(s) who have the problem. Instead, he or she confronts the entire staff in a meeting with a generalized, "We all need to do a better job of X," or "those of you who haven't turned in X need to get it to me today," hoping that the feedback will fall on the heads of the offenders.

In fact, the offenders are probably not paying attention and those who are doing a good job are offended that they're being "punished" for something they didn't do. Additionally, all the non-offenders know EXACTLY who the leader should really be confronting and it exposes the leader's weakness.

2. The "Mass Email" Approach

This method is basically the same as the Overhead Lob, except this leader can't even take the time (or is too afraid) to bring the issue up in person and instead, emails the entire staff about the issue. However, the result is the same- those who need the discipline miss it, those who don't need it are offended, and the leader looks weak. **Don't do it!**

3. The "You Deal with It" Approach

I want to say upfront that I'm all for employees addressing and attempting to resolve problems between themselves before asking a supervisor to jump in and play parent/principal/referee. However, once that attempt has been tried and failed, it's a supervisor's role to take action. It's not okay to say, "Well, if you talked to him already about it, what am I supposed to do?" It's also inappropriate for a supervisor to ask another employee to "mentor" the poor performing

employee as a way to avoid dealing with the issue himself or herself. Once an employee has tried to address the issue with a peer, it's the supervisor's job to take the next steps.

4. The "Send Them to Training" Approach

As a speaker and trainer, this particular method offends me. There's nothing like a room full of people who have been sent to training as punishment for something-- talk about a fun and interactive class! The purpose of training is to help people learn new needed skills. It should not be used as a punishment.

Leaders should address the performance issue themselves and not expect us trainers to "fix" their employees. If, after discussing the issue with the employee, training is warranted, then great, send them to us. However, PLEASE present training as an opportunity for the employee to improve or gain needed skills, not as punishment.

5. The "Work Around" Approach

In this approach, the leader basically tells the rest of the employees to just "work around" the poor performer. This can include asking other employees to do parts or all of the poor performer's job and/or asking employees to ignore disruptive, unproductive, or inappropriate behavior.

The bottom line is, your employees shouldn't have to pick up the slack for poor performers or have to ignore or tolerate bad behavior.

6. The "Do Nothing and Hope It Goes Away" Approach

If you saw a mole on your arm had developed all the signs of skin cancer, would you just say to yourself, "I know this is probably cancer, but I'm just going to ignore it and hope it goes away?" Probably not.

Most people know that the earlier cancer is detected and treated, the better. The same goes for poor performance. Dealing with it when you first notice it is going to be a lot easier and will have better long-term results, than waiting until it develops into a Stage 4 malignancy.

If you recognize yourself in any of these examples- you've taken the first step to fixing the problem- acknowledging that there is one. Now, you have to make a choice.

Choice #1- Go on fooling yourself, believing you've addressed the issue using these methods. You've "checked the box" after all. However, while you're waiting for your "discipline" to start working, your employees are losing respect for you, productivity and morale will drop, and the problem will worsen.

Choice #2- Get brave, step up, and start really dealing with performance problems by going directly to the source of the problem and confronting the issue privately and directly with that person.

I hope you make the right one.

The Top Five Discipline Habits of Effective Leaders



In the previous chapter I explained the mistakes leaders make. Here's what leaders **SHOULD** do when it comes to disciplining employees. Each of the following 5 habits are the exact opposite of the cowardly mistakes I wrote about in the previous chapter, so be sure to check out that post if you haven't already.

1. Confront employee discipline problems clearly, specifically, and directly with the employee and do it face-to-face in private.

Instead of the "Overhead Lob Approach," which is a comment to the entire group made in the hopes that the offenders "get it," or the "Mass Email Approach" which is the

same as the overhead lob, but used by those who are too chicken or lazy to deliver the lob in a meeting.

2. Encourage employees to resolve issues between themselves, but if they can't, it's your job to help.

Instead of the "You Deal with It Approach" or the "Work Around Approach" which both tell the employee, "I don't care and I'm not going to help you," here's what you can do:

1. **First, encourage the complaining employee to confront his or her coworker directly.** You can help by talking through how the conversation should go and even role-playing the conversation so the employee can practice.

2. **If step 1 doesn't work, try observing the behavior so you can confront what you've observed.** If Stephen complains that Amanda doesn't come back from lunch on time and he has to pick up her slack, be sure to be around at the end of lunch hour to see for yourself. If Amanda is late, you can address the issue and leave Stephen out of it.

3. **If you can't do step 2, or there are multiple issues between employees, bring both employees in together.** Bringing both employees in to discuss their relationships, schedules, or whatever the issue is helps ensure both sides of the issue are heard. Be prepared to break out your best mediation skills.

And no, confronting Amanda by saying, "a little bird told me," or "it's been brought to my attention," is NOT an acceptable alternative to any of the steps above. This approach will only make the conflict worst in most cases. By trying to maintain Stephen's anonymity, Amanda's objective after leaving your office will be bird hunting, not improving her performance and relationships with her coworkers.

3. Address expectations, extenuating circumstances, and consequences of behavior before confronting employees.

You can't hold employees accountable for expectations you never stated, or didn't state clearly. If there were extenuating circumstances, such as equipment failure, that kept an employee from doing the job, that must be considered as well. Finally, if there are no consequences for poor performance, then there's no real incentive, other than personal integrity, for doing things right. For those who have that personal integrity, you won't have to hold many discipline discussions. For those who don't, what are you going to say at the end of your discussion after, "If this happens again . . ."?

"If this happens again, we're going to have our 25th chat about this?"

If the first chat didn't cause the employee to change the behavior, subsequent ones won't either.

4. Send employees to training so they can learn new skills, not as punishment.

If one of the "extenuating circumstances" above was that the employee didn't know how to do what was expected, then by all means, send him or her to training. There's an old saying in training that if you put a gun to someone's head and he or she could do what you asked, it's not a training issue. The "Send Them to Training Approach" only creates a disgruntled trainee who will not be very open to learning what's taught in the class.


5. Address discipline issues immediately.

This is probably one of the most important habits. Effective leaders don't take the "Do Nothing and Hope It Goes Away Approach." They never wait for a small problem to turn into a

big one. They address ALL problems the first time they see them.

If Mark is late to work, even if it's the first time, at least mention it out of concern. "Hi Mark, I'm glad you're here. I was worried because you were 15 minutes late." If Mark has a legitimate reason, then great, it likely won't happen again and he'll appreciate your concern. If this was the first in what will become a series of late days, he'll likely think again before hitting the snooze three times tomorrow.

When discipline is handled professionally, it can be an important part of a balanced feedback process that helps keep employees on track. It also shows employees that you care enough about their success to have these sometimes-tough conversations. Additionally, when discipline is handled early, rather than waiting for a problem to grow and get worse, not only is the intervention easier for both the leader and the employee, but it also allows the employee adequate time to change course before his or her annual performance appraisal.



The ultimate success in communication is finding the frustratingly elusive balance between 'getting along' and 'getting things done.' Lean too far one way and people love you, but treat you like a doormat. Lean too far the other way, and they fear you and don't perform. Find the balance and you can achieve any goal.

– Amy Castro, CSP

About Amy Castro, CSP

If you want to present your ideas more effectively, create more satisfying and effective working relationships, lead your employees in a way that will make them want to follow, and create a workplace where people “get along and get things done” then you need Amy Castro!



Amy is a recognized Performance Communication expert, speaker, author, and blogger. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism from the George Washington University and a Master's Degree in Communication Studies/Human Communication Theory from the University of Northern Colorado. Amy has also earned the prestigious “**Certified Speaking Professional**” (CSP) status conferred by the National Speakers Association. The CSP status is the highest earned designation in the National Speakers Association with fewer than 12 percent of members worldwide earning this status.

Amy is a proud U.S. Air Force veteran, having served as a captain in the public affairs career field. After leaving the

Air Force, she founded her company, Innovative Communication & Training Solutions, which celebrated its 20-year anniversary in 2014. Amy is a board member of the Houston chapter of the National Speakers Association, a Professional Member of the National Speakers Association, member of the Association for Talent Development, and a member of both the American Communication Association and National Communication Association. She also served as an adjunct faculty member at San Jacinto College for more than 10 years, teaching public speaking and business/professional speaking.

Amy is the author of the books [Practical Communication: 25 Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Getting Along and Getting Things Done](#), [The Secrets of Effective Leadership Communication](#), and the 30-day video training program, [Communication Skills for Career Success](#).

Amy uses her down-to-earth style, REAL stories, humor, and fun to create her customized and engaging programs focused on **Performance Communication: Assertive Communication that is Positive, Purposeful, and Practical**. Her goal is for participants to leave her sessions ready to easily put new communication skills into action. Some of Amy's highest rated programs include "Presentation Skills for Professionals and Executives," "Positive Assertiveness: Stepping Up Without Stepping on Toes," "Conquering Conflict," and "Customer Service Survival Skills."

Some of Amy's current and past clients

include: Aramark, Ethyl Corporation, Sysco, Marathon Oil, Lockheed Martin, PricewaterhouseCoopers, NASA Johnson Space Center, Texas Children's Hospital, Texas Children's Pediatric Associates, McKesson Specialty Health, San Jacinto College, BioCure Pharmacy, and Harris County, Texas. To see a full client list and to read what clients have to say, visit her speaker website at www.Amy-Castro.com.