

Challenging Employee Conversations

Team leads and managers sometimes find themselves in a situation where, publicly or privately, an employee expresses frustration at the idea of being responsible for a certain task or upholding a certain standard. Anticipating this, leads and managers sometimes delay or neglect necessary conversations and the situation isn't addressed or resolved. Of course, it is important to start such conversations with clear information about what is required and the time and resources that are available to the employee in order to keep the expectation reasonable.

At the first expression of concern, leads and managers should ask what the employee perceives as a barrier to achieving the stated goal. You may have to provide context, additional details or differentiate between this instance and other concerns this or other employees have mentioned before.

Assuming these steps have been taken, you may still be faced with a first or repeated instance of communication that demonstrates one is unwilling to align with practice goals or standards. This may come in the form of publicly or privately showing exasperation or outright expressing the employee won't do the task at hand. It's a good idea to pause and note what is taking place. For example:

"Ashley, I'd like to take a beat here. Let's talk about this objectively. You are in a lead position in a surgical facility. You have been given a lot of trust. With that comes responsibility. While other team members may have difficulty executing a practice initiative at first, leadership does not. Leadership seeks only to find workability in the situation and help others through it. If Dr. _____ needs something for the safety of our patients, it is non-negotiable. If s/he gives us direction to ensure our patients are more at ease with any part of the surgical progress, it's not up for discussion. We simply follow through with what is needed to uphold the standards and integrity of the practice. As a doctor and business owner s/he knows that better than we do, and none of us is in a position to challenge that. S/he gives us plenty of opportunity to collaborate when a subject is in development, but once decisions are made, we are here to carry those forward and handle the obstacles, not create them."

Still faced with resistance or contrary communication on the subject, or demonstrating disagreement with this initiative or topic, you may have to pivot again. For example;

"Ashley, you are right. We need to be having a different conversation right now. I'm perfectly capable of helping the assistants to make this adjustment, so I'll take care of that as Dr. _____ has requested. But I'd like to call to your attention that this is not a normal conversation we are having right now. If we were to eavesdrop on any business or practice conversation, we would see that every day, things need to get done and people are responsible for doing their part. There isn't a lot of time spent on personal contrary opinions or the emotional response to the idea that something has to change. If there is a hint of that, it might occur with a new or

entry level employee who is not really on the same page as the rest of the team. But with long-term staff and especially those with elevated positions, this type of reaction and dialogue just doesn't take place. This is important to understand. Those who can't objectively embrace forward progress and help others to do the same are not qualified for elevated positions of leadership in business. You and I have had several of these conversations. I've let you know this needs to change. We have a repetitive cycle going on here and it just can't be that way. I can let Dr. _____ know that based on this, you are moving out of qualification for a leadership position and will need a position revision. Or if you were to demonstrate that you can consistently make progress in this area, I can put you on a trial basis and get you further training on this topic. But we aren't going to do this over and over again. You can anticipate that the doctor will always be improving our processes and that we all have a hand in making that happen. It is a condition of your continued employment here that you are capable of doing that."

Planning for this type of conversation in advance, keeping a composed demeanor, focusing on the steps necessary to make progress and maintaining control throughout the conversation are key. Collaborate with owners and managers to ensure you take a professional approach to upholding practice standards and aren't distracted by the momentary tension that may be in play. Getting employees through this type of conversation and following through to ensure the right outcome or corrective action will benefit the entire team over time.