

# HANDLING PRECIOUS PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

Dealing with colleagues can be difficult, Karen Gately, leadership and people-management specialist, author of *The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people*, and a founder of Ryan Gately, teaches us how



**W**e've all met them. The overly emotional colleague who is all too easily offended and overacts to the smallest of issue. The hyper critical colleague who finds fault in everything. People who argue points simply to prove themselves right. Those who personalise every issue, constantly complain and become upset when things don't go their way. These people can be exhausting and sap us of vital energy.

The ability to respond with emotional intelligence and constructive behaviour is a reasonable expectation to have of anyone in the workplace. Holding people accountable to thinking and behaving in ways that enable success is both fair and necessary. Creating a workplace environment in which the best possible outcomes are achieved through open, healthy, robust debate depends on it.

Whether you're the precious person's manager or colleague, there are steps you can take to have a positive influence on their thinking and behaviour. While there is no magic wand, honest feedback delivered with respect and sensitivity is essential. 'Holding the mirror up' can go a long way toward waking people up to the influence they are having on their own happiness and success.

## **Have empathy and listen to understand**

Typically, sensitive people need to feel heard and understood. Having empathy and listening is critical to earning their trust and in turn influencing their behaviour. Begin by furthering your understanding of not only what they feel but why.

Understanding people will better enable you to earn their trust and ultimately influence their approach. Ask questions that will help you to gain insight to the beliefs

and assumptions fuelling their concerns or motivating their behaviours. Have compassion but remain objective.

## **Set boundaries**

Reflect on the hypersensitive people in your life. How much time and energy do you spend on people who never seem to follow through to fix the issues they complain about? Do you find yourself listening to the concerns of people who seem determined to believe in a pessimistic view of their world?

If allowed to, precious people will drain us of energy to fuel their seemingly never-ending need for negativity and drama. It's up to you to protect your energy reserves, by limiting the time and attention you give them. Don't fall into the trap of fixing 'drama queen' problems for them. They will draw on your talents and energy for as long as you allow them to.

Set clear boundaries about the conversations you will or won't engage in. Excuse yourself from negative discussions about other people, pointless issues or over dramatized points of view. Set an example of professionalism and emotional intelligence and people are less likely to share their dramas with you.

## **Have expectations**

Healthy workplace cultures require that we listen to, care for and support our colleagues to cope with the challenges they encounter at work. Begin by expecting people, with respect and consideration, to take responsibility for how they feel and impact others around them.

Be proactive and pre-empt how certain people on your team may react in various circumstances. This is especially important as you work to drive changes through your team or organisation. Give ample warning of change,

alloy fears before they grow and invite people to contribute their ideas to avoid outcomes that worry them.

## **Have tough love conversations**

Engage in honest conversations with people about the impacts of their behaviour on you, others and their own reality. Be upfront while at the same time sensitive in your approach. Understand the influence you will have in part dependant on the depth of trust in your relationship.

Encourage people to speak about any concerns before they become blown out of proportion. Challenge people to choose to think differently when unfounded beliefs and assumptions fuel their concerns. Help people to see alternative perspective and options they can choose to focus on or believe in. Respectfully challenge exaggerated reactions, so they set those reactions aside to enable a meaningful and productive conversation.

Help people to understand that the way they are choosing to feel is undermining their judgement and ultimately their ability to succeed. Be empathetic while at the same time encouraging people to choose more productive thoughts and emotions.

Reach decisions you feel are appropriate and be prepared to explain your reasoning if questioned. Shut down repeated complaints that have already been responded to.

## **Give positive feedback**

Typically, sensitive people need validation from their peers to feel confident in their work and relationships. Building confidence and a strong sense of belonging are essential; so too is reinforcing productive emotions and behaviours, while challenging those that are not.