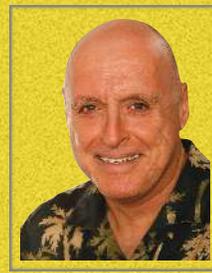


# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 476 How Will You Handle Tough Conversations?

In every workplace there are conversations that should take place but don't because someone is uncomfortable, or they're not handled well. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, let's talk about tough conversations, next, on The Extra Point.

Few managers are equipped to handle difficult conversations with workers. They're just not, and many avoid them because they're unsure of where these discussions will lead.

One of the key courses we offer at Guam Training is The New Boss. It's designed to cut the learning curve for someone transitioning from the front line to management. It can also be a refresher for those with more experience. We've added a module that deals with this issue, providing direction on how to address various situations.

For example, you tell Mary she needs to improve her attitude. If you leave it at that it starts the discussion off on a rough note and will make her defensive. Nobody likes to hear their boss say they have a bad attitude. In addition, it's a general statement and doesn't tell Mary anything other than you're not happy and she has to change. It forces her to say, "What do you mean?" When she does you then escalate the situation by telling her what's wrong and she gets more defensive.

We advise managers to start such interactions with something positive, giving praise, then transition to the reason you called the meeting. A great phrase to use when moving from one topic to the next is "help me understand."

Assume I've told Mary I was pleased with her report at the recent staff meeting. I transition, "Mary, I'm a little confused by something that's come to my attention. I'm hoping you can help me understand. I'm told you got into a heated argument with John yesterday over the ABC account, both of you yelling. I also got a

complaint from a customer who said you were rude on a service call. I want to hear your side. What happened?"

I was specific and I didn't accuse her of anything. Beginning with praise, I've given her no reason to be defensive. When I transitioned I indicated I was confused by something, not that I was passing judgment on her. Next, I brought up the issues and still not judging or accusing, I gave her the opportunity to explain her position.

Here's the reality of managing, trouble happens in real time. You can't hit the pause button or call for a time out. You have to respond now, and it has to be effective.

- How will you handle conflict between workers, or when someone tells you directly, "I don't like \_\_\_\_\_ (and you can fill in the blank)?"
- Or when you learn some members of your team feel you play favorites?
- How about when your best worker tells you they don't feel appreciated and they're looking to quit for another job?
- How will you reply when someone says you broke your word?

I advise you to make a list of potential situations and ways you'd like to respond. Then practice. When the issue takes place you'll know how to react. You'll be ready.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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