



TACKLING HARMFUL BEHAVIOURS EARLY IS CRITICAL.

Are you willing and able to embrace harmful behaviour?

Joe Moore, conflict resolution expert from Kimber Moore and Associates, speaks with **Helen Berger**.

YOUR LATEST workplace dispute may appear to have the plot line of a short-lived soap opera—but if you fail to intervene you could find yourself playing in a long-running drama.

Some managers appear not to worry about the harmful behaviours of others. For them, it seems a relief to hear themselves or others say, “It’s just a personality clash” or “He/she is a bit of a princess” or “It’s just a bit of drama.”

But is this the case? “Surprisingly, one of the ways we start to show some interest in dealing with [harmful behaviour] is by saying things like, ‘Well, you know, it’s just a bit of drama,’” says conflict resolution expert Joe Moore.

So rather than viewing these comments as a cue to ‘exit stage left’, he says they should be seen as a signal to start conversing, to find out what’s going on. “Maybe it’s a bit of an office drama, mate—but what are the pros and cons of doing something about it?”

To those involved, the ‘drama’ is time-consuming and anxiety-provoking, Moore says. It can also be a sign of worse to come.

He says managers must ask questions to find out: What behaviours led to someone saying, “This is a bit of a drama”? Who is taking responsibility for it? Is it safe to ignore the drama or is action required? If action is required, start getting the people involved to talk it through with each other.

It is also crucial for a manager to be clear about his or her role in helping to solve the problem. “You’re not taking responsibility for solving what’s going on. You’re taking responsibility for helping people figure it out,” Moore says.

But are managers capable of fulfilling this role? “It is a huge challenge. Most managers get promoted ‘off the tools’ because of their problem-solving ability. But it rarely means problem-solving ability is an expression of how they work with the team to solve problems ...”

What tends to happen is that managers rush to find the cause of the issue rather than helping others to solve the problem, Moore says.

“Part of the solution lies in having serious conversations with managers about their roles—‘While you’re busy walking around solving other people’s problems, there are some key things you are not doing as a manager. A manager solving day-to-day operational problems is not being strategic’—and as soon as you make that point, you start to get them to understand,” says Moore.

But what happens when management strategy fuels less-than-optimal behaviour? Climbing the corporate ladder can be competitive, and behaviours such as lobbying and building alliances to get ideas accepted can intensify. “Lobbying and cajoling to get an idea over the line [is a red] flag for a company that has problems with the way decisions are made,” Moore says.

Companies should think about how they transact business within their organisations and ask themselves the following questions: How do we make this decision? What data do we need to make this decision? How will we know if what we decide will get us what we want? What is the review of this going to be?

If the responses to these questions lack clarity and substance, “then the only answer left is politics, in the negative sense, which is the cajoling, wheedling, and running around influencing”, Moore explains. “To dry up that behaviour, the answer lies in devoting time to getting clear responses.

“Organisations that excel at making decisions understand the important decisions affecting performance. They make the way material decisions are made routine by removing the guesswork from knowing who recommends, who needs to agree, who has the veto power, who should have input, who provides the data, which data is required to help make a decision, and who is accountable for follow-through,” Moore says.

Generally, when it comes to managing harmful behaviour, Moore suggests keeping in mind that such behaviour can take many forms. “You can’t [possibly]

have a protocol for [managing] every kind of difficult behaviour,” he says.


Rather, use examples of good behaviour, reward and praise people for doing the right thing, and penalise poor behaviour. “Then you start to create an expectation at work that, when push comes to shove,

along is important; and ask for the person’s thoughts. “It’s about what is important, why it is important, and how we can [encourage] healthy relationships,” he says.

Tackling harmful behaviours early is critical, otherwise they can escalate. “It would be very rare for someone to come to work one day and, with no prior warning, [start] to bully,” Moore says, adding, “Minimise the chances of people getting away with behaving [badly] and taking that as an invitation to behave [worse].”

This won’t eradicate all of the worst kinds of behaviours, Moore warns, but you will experience a reduction of them.

In addition, organisational, not just individual, responses are needed to help keep harmful behaviours at bay. This includes, for example, talking about these issues openly and often.

A good place to start is to think about the age-old question: How would you like to be treated? 

‘DRAMA’

A cue to intervene and resolve the conflict, not to exit stage left.

we want to be able to get along with one another.”

Also address specific behaviour in conversations, Moore says. Avoid giving lectures; build conversations around what happened, the effects, and why getting



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