

# Difficult Conversations and Sensitive Topics - Out of Work Issues

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# Out of Work Issues

In an ideal world, the personal and professional do not interlink. In other words we are not supposed to bring our personal problems into work.

## REALITY CHECK!

It is not always possible to keep the two completely separate.

Sometimes, as employees, we need practical and emotional support in the workplace.

Give this support properly and you will gain a more committed and loyal employee.



# Out of Work Issues

Medical Issues  
Disabilities

Relationships

Family  
Commitments /  
Child Care

Addiction

Religion

Homelessness

Financial



# Bereavement

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What's this got to do with my business?



# Bereavement



**Bereavement is what we suffer when someone we care about dies.**

**It doesn't have to be a close blood relative to have a life changing impact.**

**Bereavement can have a massive impact on our emotional stability.**



# Bereavement



So why is discussing bereavement potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because the employee is likely to be very emotional
- Because the bereavement might be affecting their ability to do their job properly
- Because they might require medical help in order to cope with life

# Bereavement





# Bereavement





# Bereavement



# Bereavement



# Bereavement



# Feedback

The manager got this very wrong.

Using an unsympathetic approach resulted in a very upset and aggrieved employee.

Ask yourself, if you had just been treated like this, would you stay with the company?



# Bereavement





# Bereavement



# Bereavement





# Bereavement



# Bereavement



# Feedback

**This time the manager remembered their humanity and recognized how they would feel if they were in the employee's shoes.**

**Empathy is crucial in this sort of situation.**

**By supporting the employee and recognizing how they are feeling, the manager is actually helping the employee and minimizing the impact on the business.**



# Medical Issues / Disabilities

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How is this going to affect the workplace?



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



**Many medical issues and disabilities require ongoing treatment.**

**This means that the employee will require time off work, possibly on a regular basis and sometimes on short notice.**

**Some time off will be to attend appointments and some will be for management of their condition.**

**Many conditions also require the employee to make drastic lifestyle changes.**



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



So why is discussing medical issues / disabilities potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because the employee or you might be embarrassed
- Because the employee might be scared
- Because the employee might be afraid that you will feel that they can no longer do their job
  - They might worry that you will treat them differently
  - They might worry that you will not meet their support needs



# Medical Issues / Disabilities





# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Feedback

In this instance the employee is going through an incredibly stressful and frightening experience.

The last thing the employee needs is added stress that might have a negative effect on her recovery.

Morally, the manager should be ashamed of himself.



# Medical Issues / Disabilities





# Medical Issues / Disabilities





# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Medical Issues / Disabilities



# Feedback

By using a sympathetic approach, the manager is supporting the employee and creating a situation where the employee will feel valued by the company.

This is more likely to cause the employee to act in a manner that will cause the least inconvenience to the business.

It is also likely to result in feelings of loyalty to the company.



# Relationships

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It's nothing to do with work, so why should I care?



# Relationships



**Our personal relationships with our partners are often central to our sense of well being.**

**A relationship that is abusive or that ends prematurely and unexpectedly can have a catastrophic affect on our general well being.**

**It can be very difficult to stop this affecting our behaviour at work.**

# Relationships

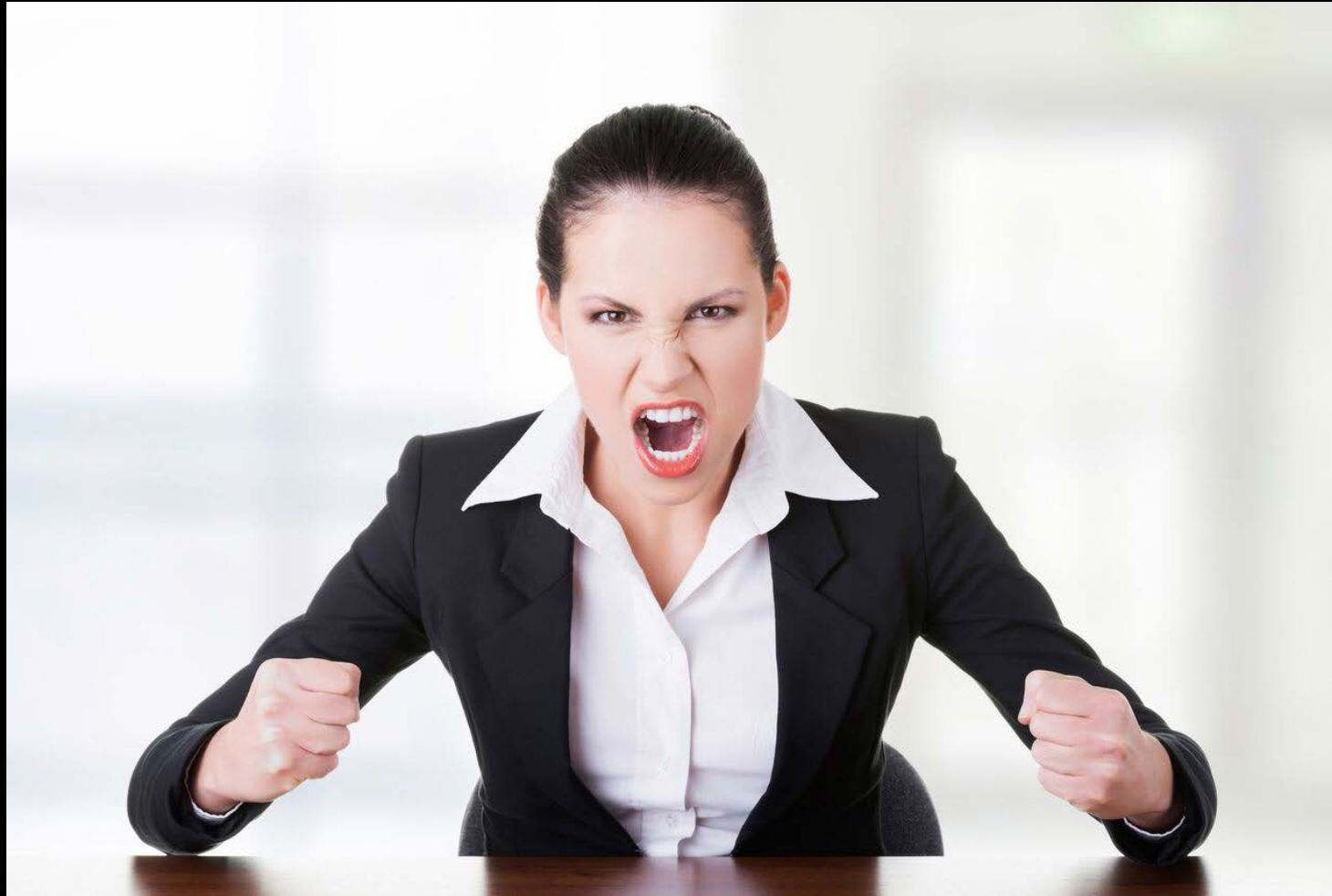


So why is discussing a relationship potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because the employee might be very emotional
  - Upset
  - Humiliated
  - Angry
- Because the employee might feel it is an intrusion into their private life



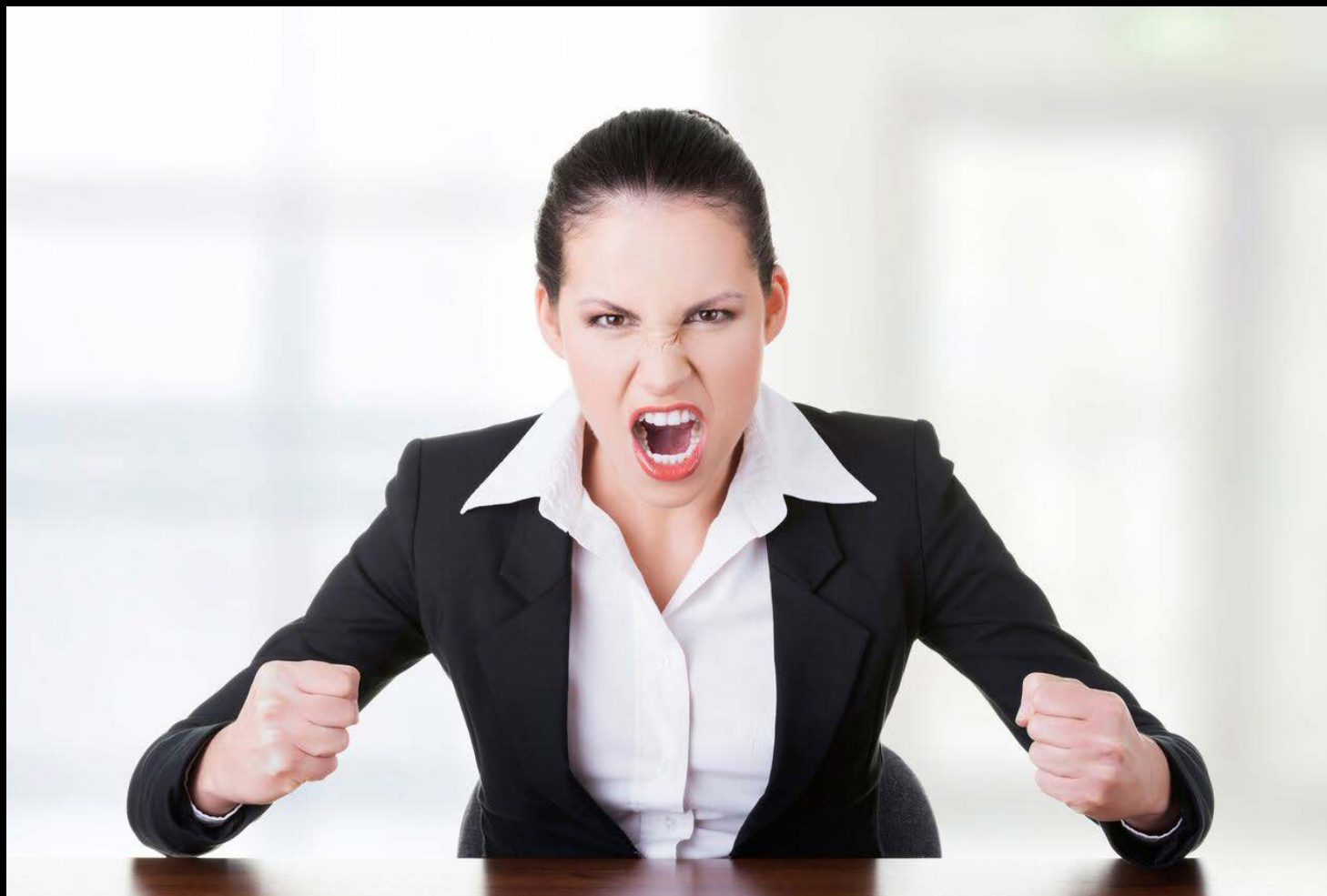
# Relationships



# Relationships



# Relationships



# Feedback

The employee is clearly distraught. Shouting at them is not going to help the situation.

The manager needs the employee to be able to function at work. Adding to what is already an extremely stressful situation is more likely to result in a long term absence than a productive and engaged employee.



# Relationships



# Relationships





# Relationships



# Relationships



# Relationships



# Feedback

The manager has used a sympathetic but realistic approach here.

By making some practical suggestions she is actually enabling the employee to deal with the situation and minimize the impact on the business.



# Family Commitments / Child Care

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Is this really my problem?



# Family Commitments / Child Care



**Many of us have people in our private lives who depend on us, be that partners, elderly relatives or children.**

**Sometimes these people need us to take time off work in order to look after them.**





# Family Commitments / Child Care



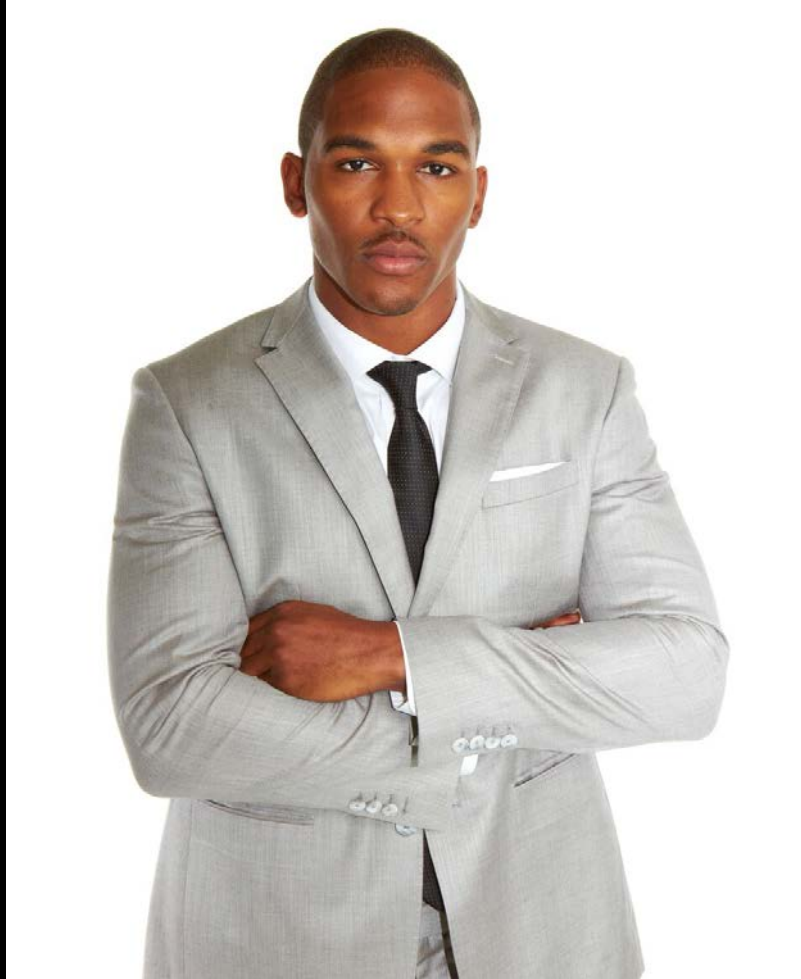
So why is discussing family commitments / childcare potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because emotions are likely to be running high
- Because the employee might feel that they have no choice about meeting their commitment, regardless of your thoughts
- Because the employee might feel it is an intrusion into their private life
- Because the employee might feel that they are being treated unfairly

# Family Commitments / Child Care



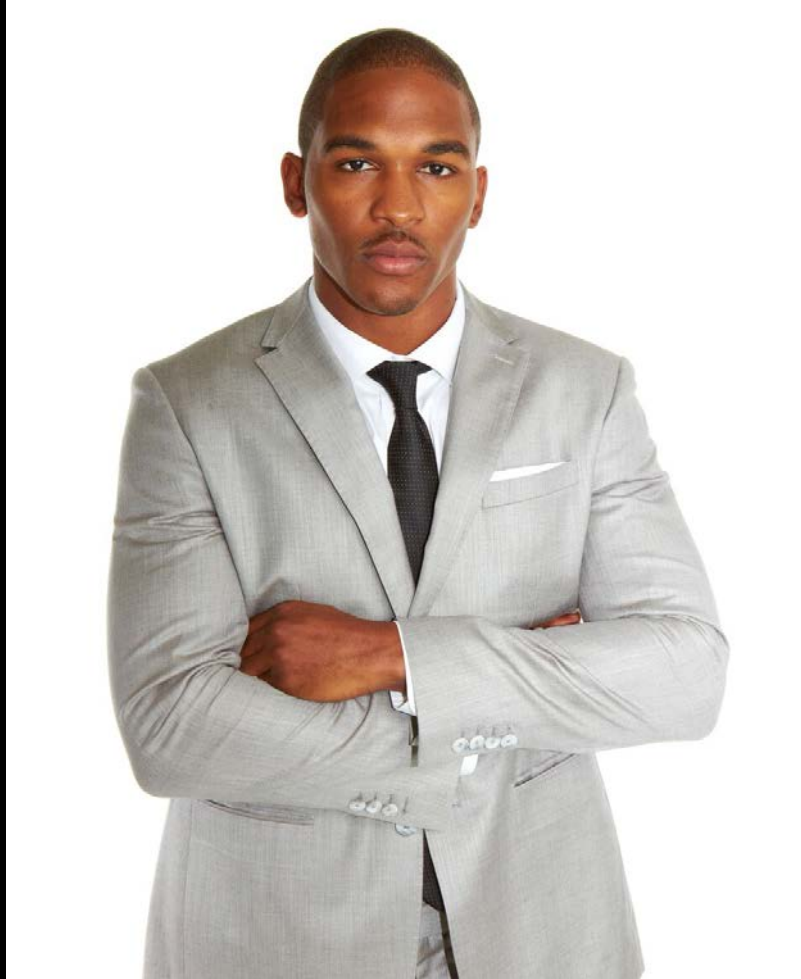
# Family Commitments / Child Care



# Family Commitments / Child Care



# Family Commitments / Child Care



# Family Commitments / Child Care





# Feedback

The manager is asking the employee to choose between their work commitments and their family commitments.

Which would you choose?

No matter how much I loved a job and / or needed the money, I would choose my family every single time. Most people would.

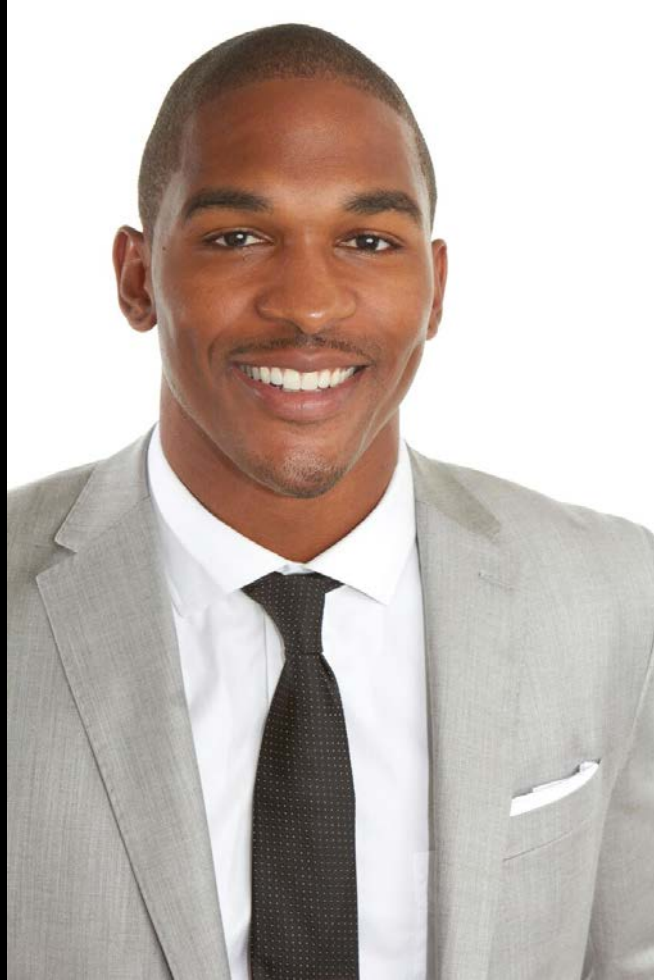
By putting the employee in this position, the manager is potentially creating an escalating situation.



# Family Commitments / Child Care



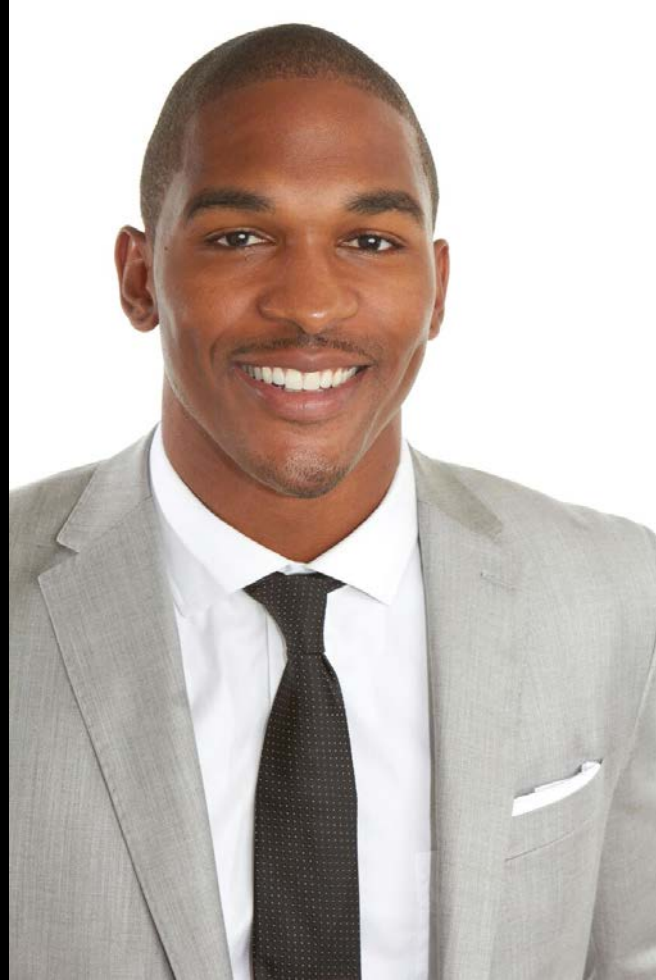
# Family Commitments / Child Care



# Family Commitments / Child Care



# Family Commitments / Child Care

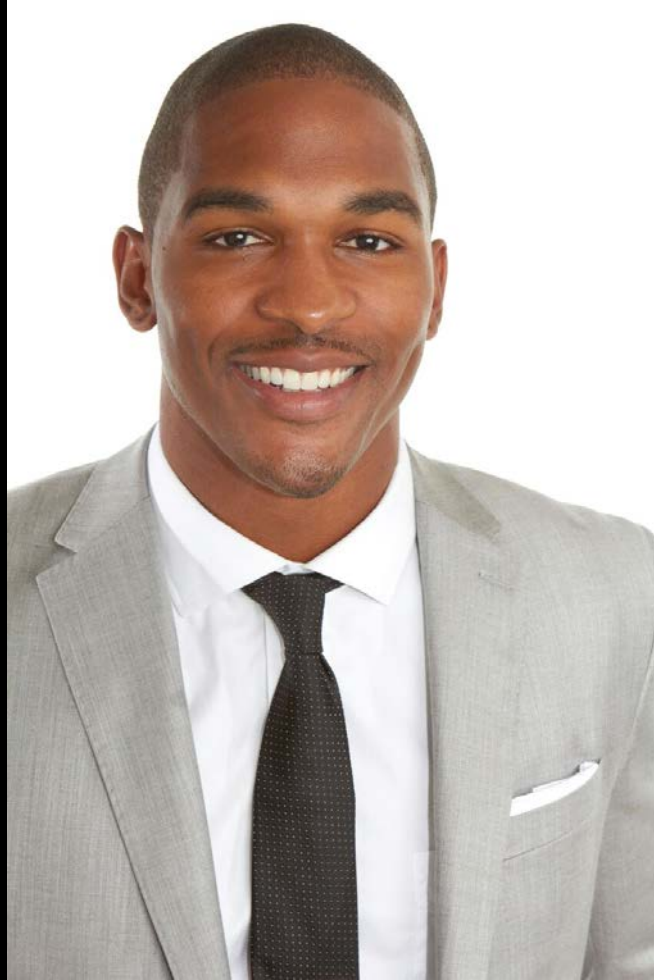


# Family Commitments / Child Care





# Family Commitments / Child Care



# Feedback

The manager is using empathy to understand the employee's dilemma.

By recognizing the short term need, the manager has opened the door to a conversation about a more practical long term solution that has a minimal impact on the business.



# Addiction

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What am I supposed to do?



# Addiction



Addiction can take many different forms.  
Examples include:

- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Gambling
- Nicotine
- Sex

As a manager, your job is not to 'fix' the addiction but instead to help the employee get the help they need.

# Addiction

So why is discussing addiction potentially a sensitive topic?



- Because emotions are likely to be running high
- Because the employee might not be willing to accept the severity of their addiction and the reality of its impact
- Because the employee might be resistant to the idea of getting help
- Because the employee might be concerned that they will lose their job

# Addiction





# Addiction



# Addiction



# Addiction



# Addiction



# Feedback

Blaming an addiction on a basic lack of will power shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the addiction issue.

This manager has used an almost narcissistic approach, that doesn't recognize that the individual requires professional help and support.

Alienating the individual is not going to help them get the help they need.



# Addiction





# Addiction



# Addiction



# Addiction



# Addiction



# Addiction



# Feedback

The manager has helped the employee recognize that they have a problem and that they need professional help.

These are the vital first steps if the employee is to have any chance of dealing with their addiction.



# Religion

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Why should I care?





# Religion



Many religions have specific days of worship and celebration. Certain occasions may require extra acts of worship.

The festival in question, combined with the individual's personal beliefs, will impact on the level of religious observance required.

A good employer should balance the religious requirements of the individual against the needs of the business, adopting a flexible approach where possible.



# Religion

So why is discussing religion potentially a sensitive topic?



- Because neither one of you might fully appreciate the other's position
- Because the employee might feel that you are asking them to choose between their religious obligations and their job
- Because the employee might feel that you are treating them unfairly compared to other employees with different beliefs

# Religion



# Religion



# Religion



# Religion



# Feedback

Whilst the manager was unable to accommodate the employee's request, there was no need to be disrespectful about their beliefs and religion.

This was very poorly handled.





# Religion



# Religion



# Religion



# Religion



# Religion



# Feedback

The manager's approach was much better here; there was no disrespect shown to the employee for their religious beliefs.

The manager has offered the employee a reasonable solution going forward which will allow the employee to meet their religious requirements whilst causing a minimum of disruption to the business.



# Homelessness

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As long as they can get to work, does it matter?





# Homelessness



Homelessness occurs when, for whatever reason, we lose our home and have nowhere settled to live.

Many individuals in this situation find themselves sleeping in their cars or on friends' sofas.

This is an incredibly stressful situation.

# Homelessness



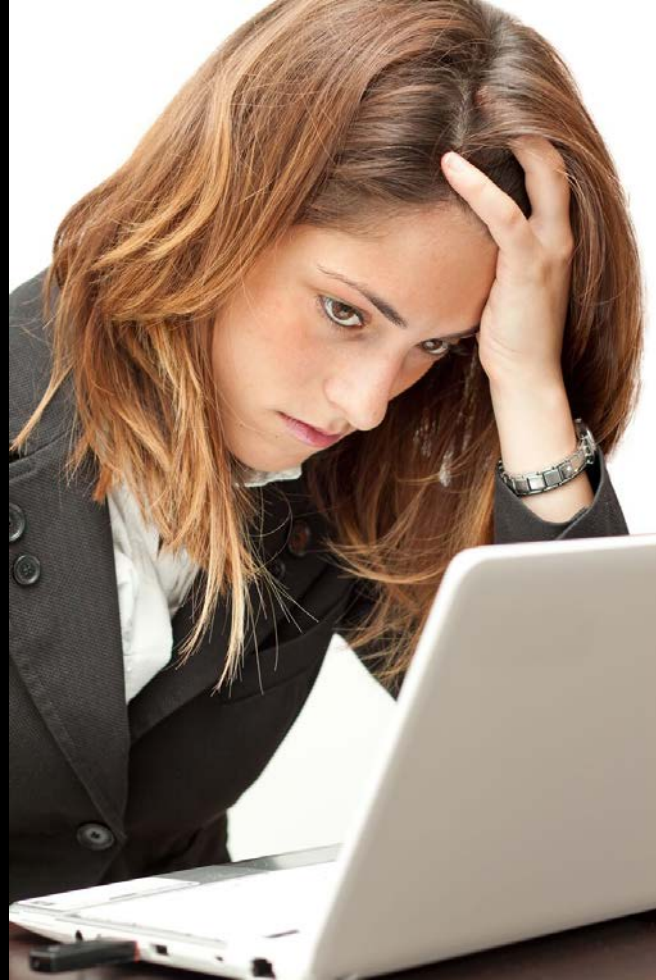
So why is discussing homelessness potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because the employee might be embarrassed
- Because the employee might be very emotional about the circumstances which have made them homeless
- Because the employee might not know what to do

# Homelessness



# Homelessness





# Homelessness



# Feedback

**The manager's approach has not helped. The employee now feels terrible and totally unsupported. It would take a very strong individual to cope with this amount of stress.**

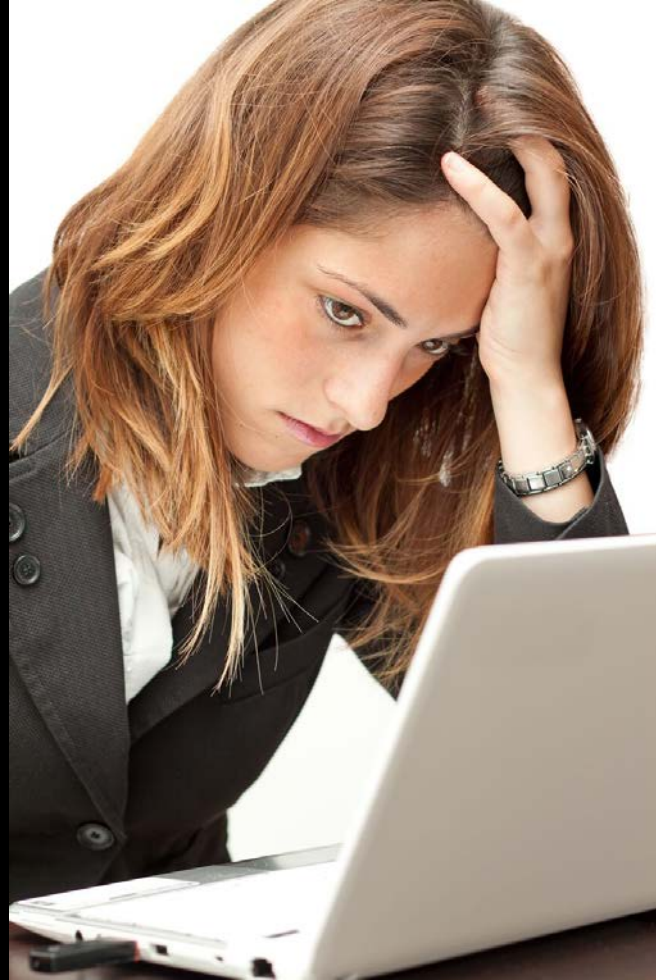


# Homelessness





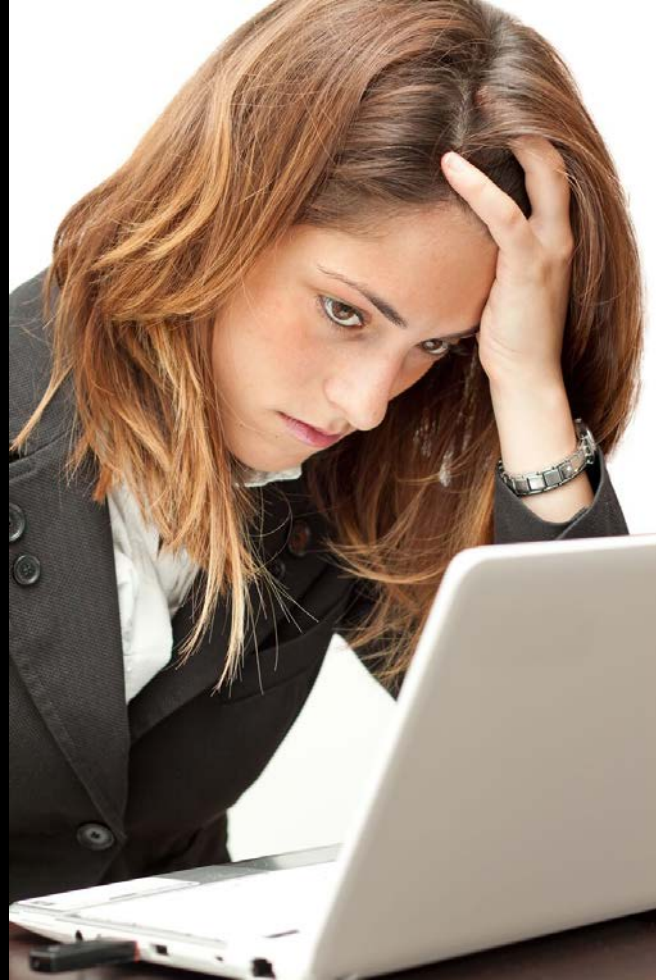
# Homelessness



# Homelessness



# Homelessness



# Homelessness





# Homelessness



# Feedback

The manager has taken a very practical approach to the employee's situation.

Whilst the employee is still homeless, the manager has not added to their stress. This means that it is less likely to have an impact on their ability to do their job.



# Financial

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Well we all worry about money, don't we?





# Financial



Most people worry about money in some capacity but there is a difference between struggling to make ends meet and being so severely in debt that you cannot see anyway out.

There are a variety of reasons why someone might end up in financial difficulties.

Regardless of whether it is that individual's fault or not, the outcome and stress is the same.

# Financial



So why is discussing someone's financial difficulties potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because they might be embarrassed
- Because emotions are likely to be running high
- Because they may be so focussed on the problem they cannot see a solution
- Because there may be additional issues in their personal life which have contributed to the situation

# Financial



# Financial





# Financial



# Feedback



**This is a person on the edge. The sort of attitude displayed by the manager here may be just enough to push the person over the edge.**



# Financial





# Financial



# Financial



# Financial



# Financial





# Financial



# Feedback

The manager's approach helps the employee recognize that it is not hopeless and that there is professional help out there.

In this instance, by offering to proactively signpost the employee to an independent debt advice service, the manager has removed some of the stress from the employee. It has also made the employee feel like something positive is happening.



# Summary



Sometimes the issues we have in our personal life are so severe that they impact on our work life.

A good manager will recognise this and do their best to support the employee, rather than adding to the stress the employee is under.

Yes, the business' needs are a priority but ignore the issues of your employees and totally sacrifice their needs and you will run the risk of increasing your business costs quite dramatically.

