

Difficult Conversations and Sensitive Topics - In Work issues



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In Work Issues

There are a variety of in work situations and issues which can affect our performance and behaviour at work.

REALITY CHECK!

It is your job to effectively manage these situations so that performance is not affected.

You need to think about working with the employee to help them. Treat them as just another annoying problem, rather than actually dealing appropriately with them, and watch your work environment and productivity suffer.



In Work Issues

Medical
Issues /
Disabilities

Workplace
Affairs

Arguments

Bullying and
Harassment

Personal
Hygiene

Appearance

Religion



Performance

Is the employee not doing their job properly?



Performance

Job Performance

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

APPRAISAL FOR

Performance Rating

- ☐ High
- ☐ Above Average
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Below Average
- ☐ Low

Employee Name: _____

Position: _____

Time in present position: _____

Ref. _____

When we talk about ‘performance’ what do we actually mean?

Very simply, we are referring to how well the employee does their job.



Performance

So why is discussing performance potentially a sensitive topic?



- Because the employee may take it as a personal insult
 - Anger
 - Resentment
- Because it might lead to disciplinary action
 - Defensive
 - Blame game
- Because there might be another issue which is affecting their performance

Performance



Performance



Performance



Performance



Performance



Feedback

The manager's whole approach was inappropriate.

Rather than attempting to find out what was causing the performance issues, the manager went straight on the offensive, thus alienating the employee.

When an employee has a performance issue, the intended cause of action is to identify the cause and then **SUPPORT** the employee in moving forward to overcome the issue.



Performance



Performance



Performance



Performance



Performance



Performance



Feedback

This was a lot better.

By taking a more open and friendly approach, the manager enabled the employee to feel that they could be honest about the cause of their performance issue.

Because the manager appears genuinely concerned about the employee, the employee is more likely to proactively engage with the required action.

The employee is left feeling valued and supported, with a real desire to help remedy the situation.



Medical Issues / Disabilities

Has the employee got a condition that is affecting their ability to do their job?



Medical Issues / Disabilities



What do we actually mean by medical issues / disabilities?

A relevant medical issue could be anything which is affecting the employee's ability to do their job / focus on their job.

Disabilities often have a legal definition. In the UK, you are classed as disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

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

The manager seems to think that the issue is about him and his inconvenience, and not the employee and their needs. This is a massive mistake.

He is insensitive and insulting.

His approach is going to result in a very unhappy and alienated employee. In some countries, if he continues in this vein, his actions may get the company sued.



Medical Issues / Disabilities



Medical Issues / Disabilities



Medical Issues / Disabilities



Medical Issues / Disabilities



Medical Issues / Disabilities



Feedback

By encouraging the employee to be open and honest about their situation and their specific support requirements, the manager is helping stop the employee from feeling embarrassed, as well as getting the information he needs in order to manage the situation.

A few minor adjustments and a degree of flexibility is often all that is required to enable a employee in this situation to continue to be a positive, proactive and engaged member of the workforce.

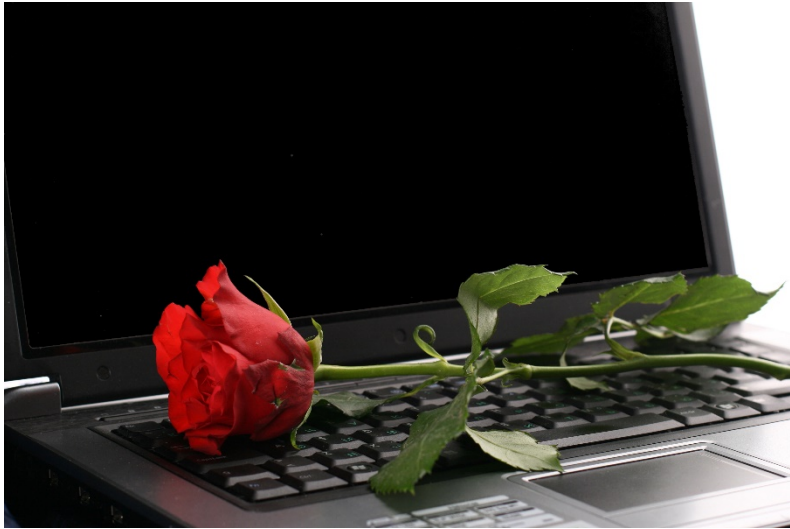


Workplace Affairs

Is this going to cause a problem?



Workplace Affairs



What is a work place affair?

It is an intimate relationship between two individuals (of any gender) who work for the same organisation.

Workplace Affairs

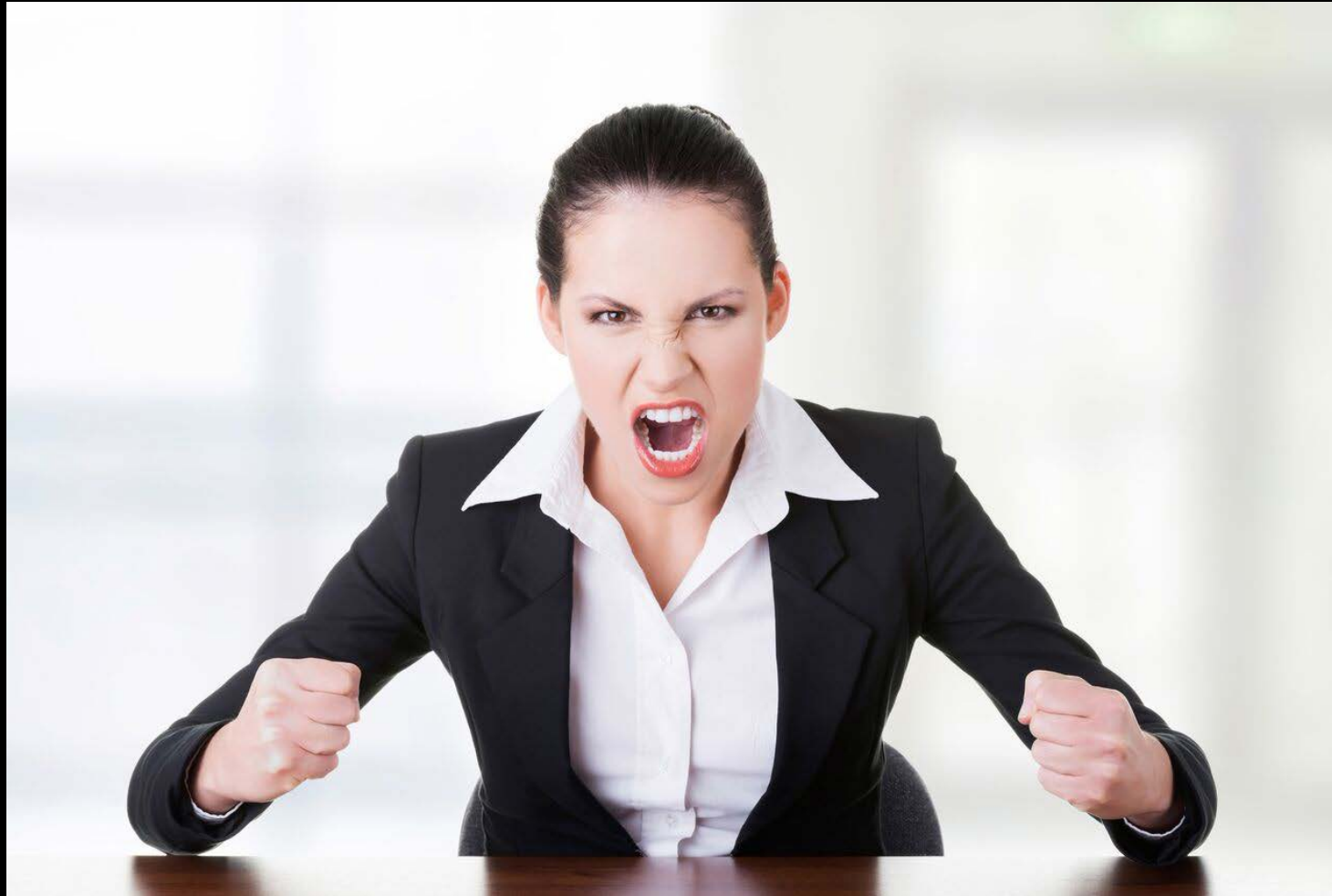


So why is discussing a workplace affair potentially a sensitive topic?

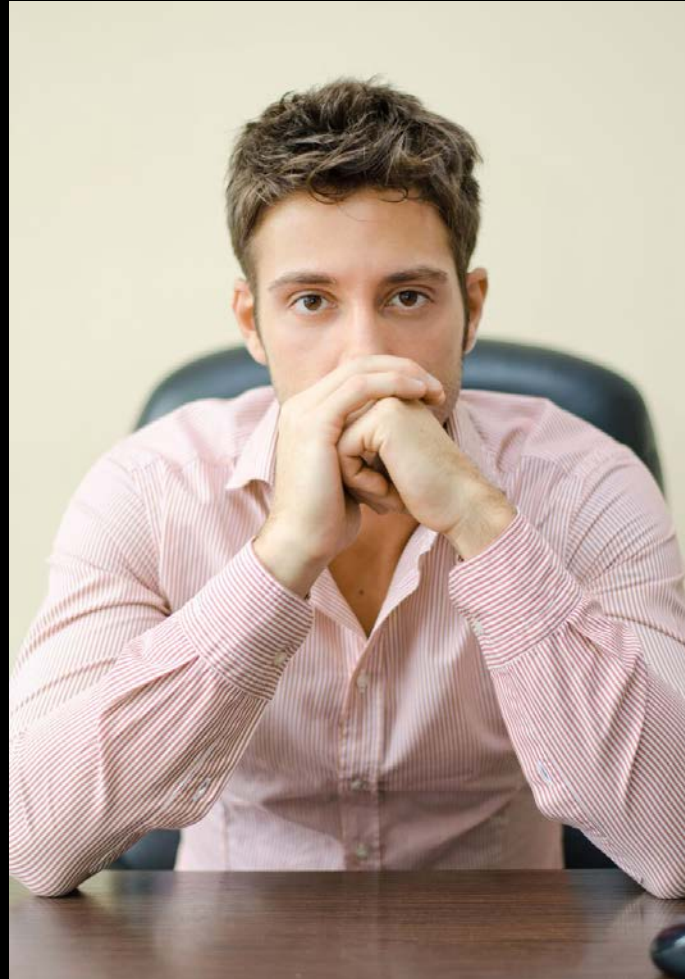
- Because the employee or you might be embarrassed
- Because the employee might feel it is an intrusion into their private life
- Because the employee might be scared that it will have a detrimental affect on their career
- Because the employee might be afraid that you will feel that they can no longer do their job
 - They might worry that you will treat them differently



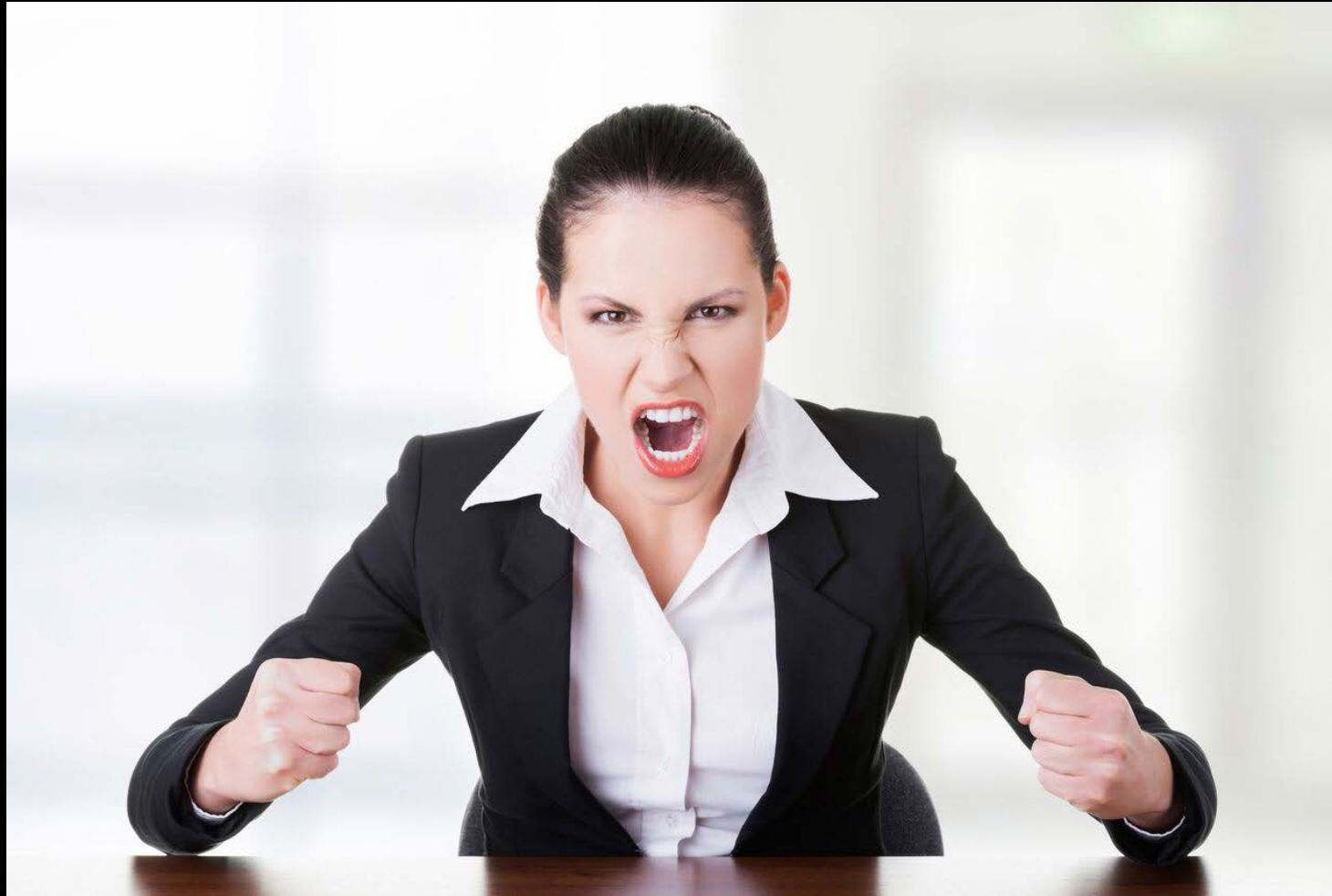
Workplace Affairs



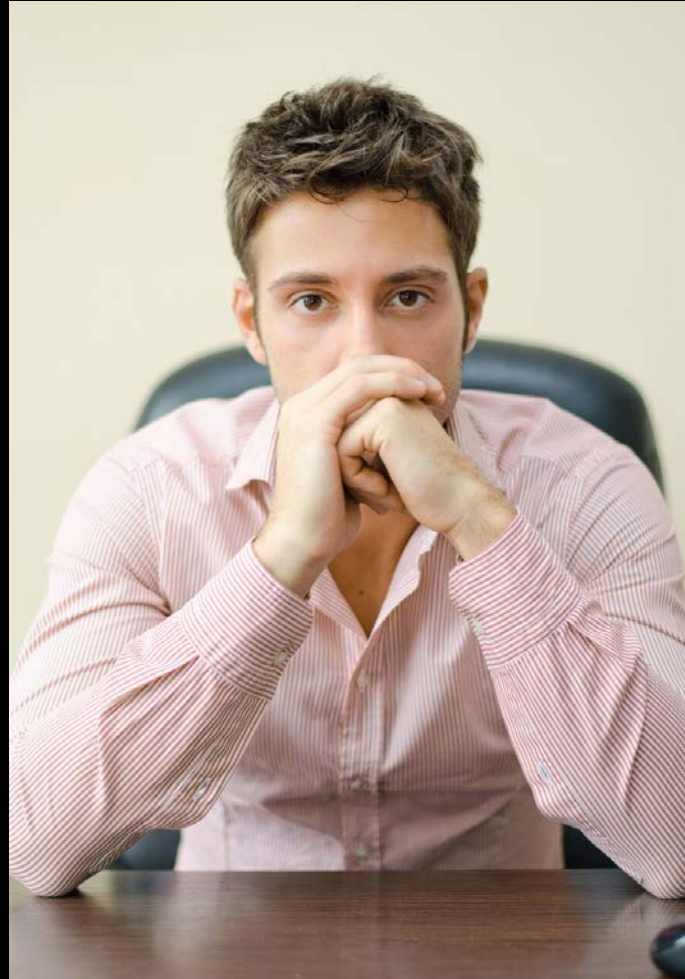
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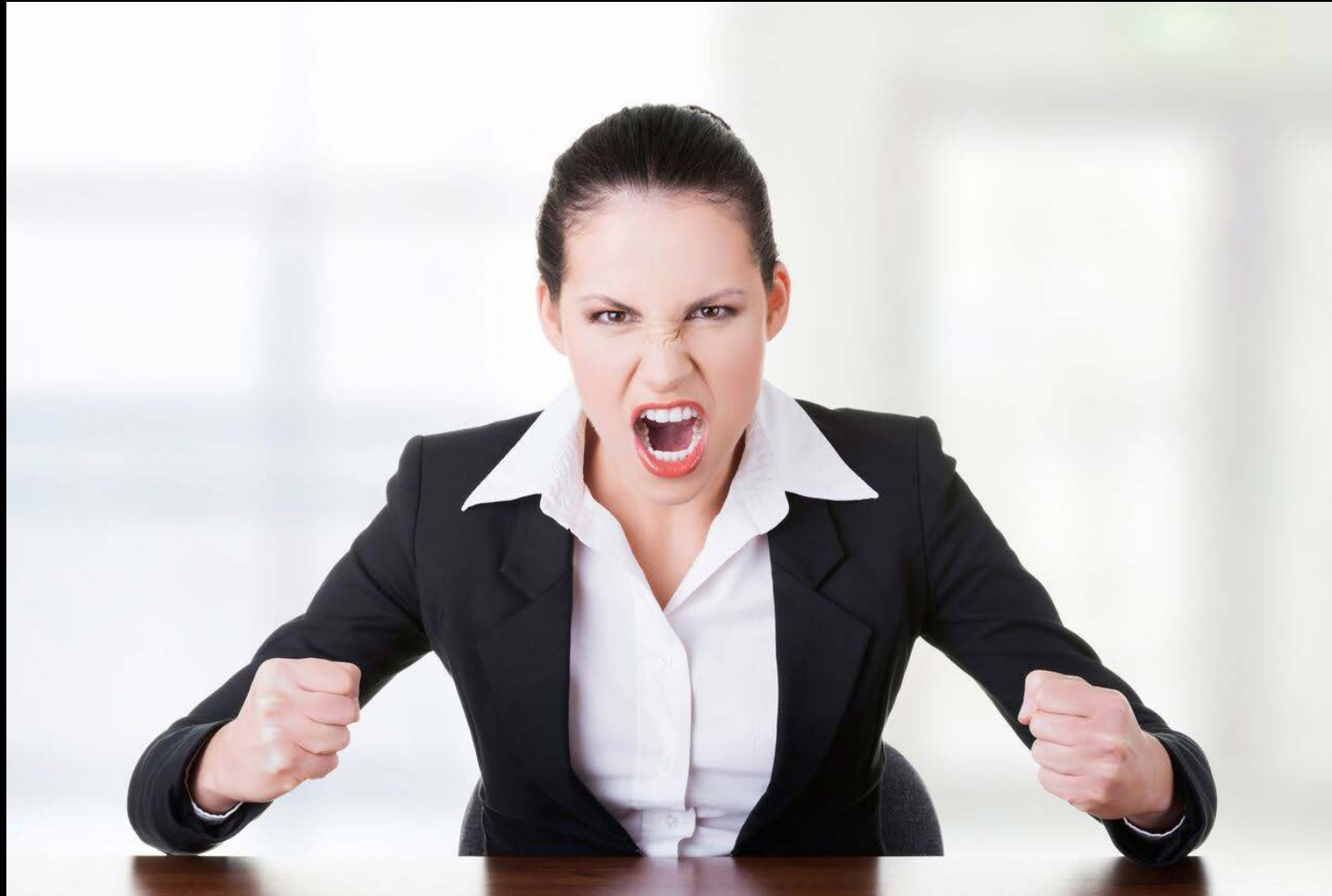
Workplace Affairs



Workplace Affairs



Workplace Affairs



Feedback

This sort of approach is totally wrong and will nearly always be taken personally by the parties involved in the affair. This in turn can have quite a dramatic and unfortunate conclusion, that will benefit no-one.

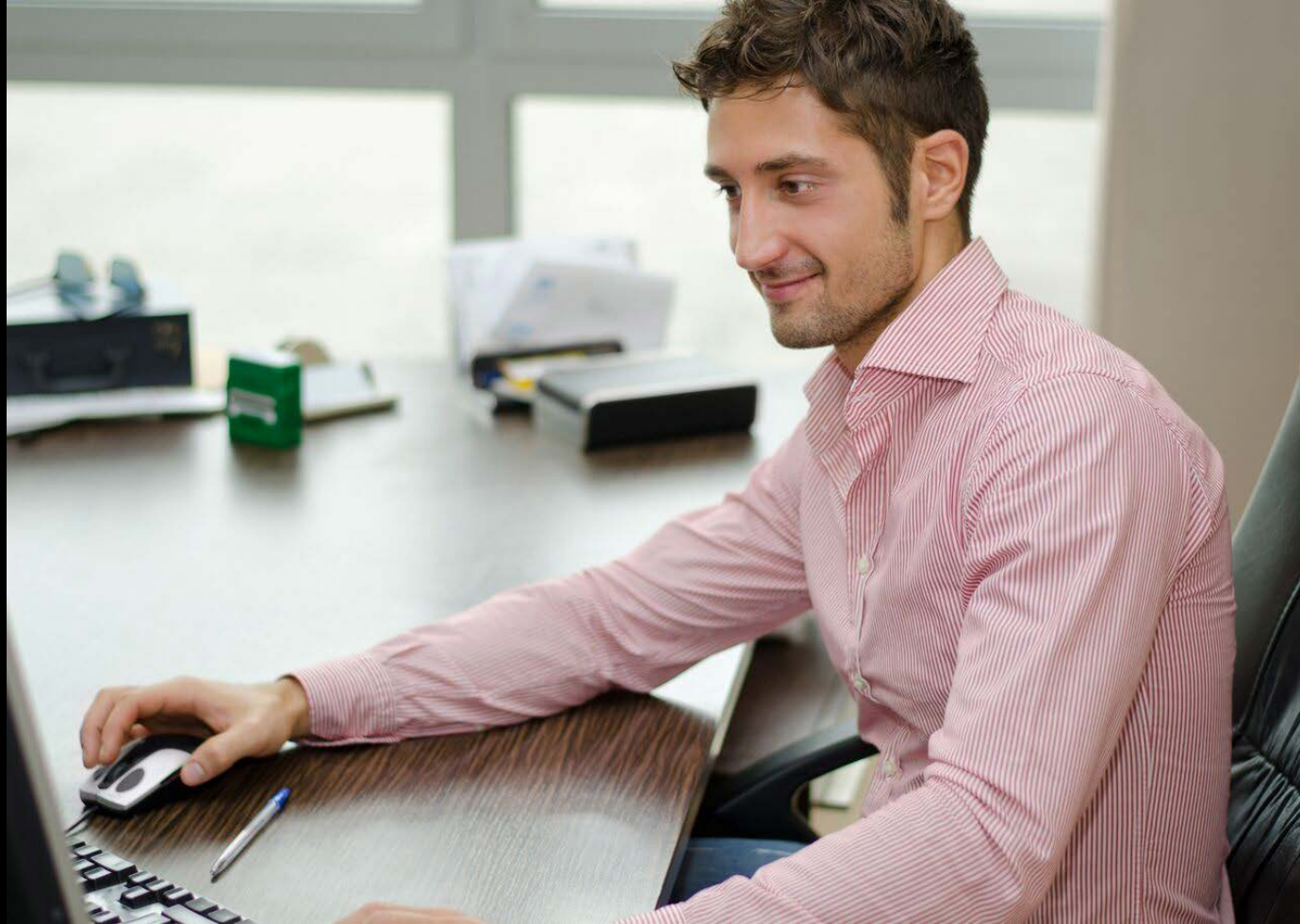
The manager needs to recognize that there is a difference between sexual activity in work time (which raises all sorts of conduct and disciplinary issues) and sexual activity outside of work hours.



Workplace Affairs



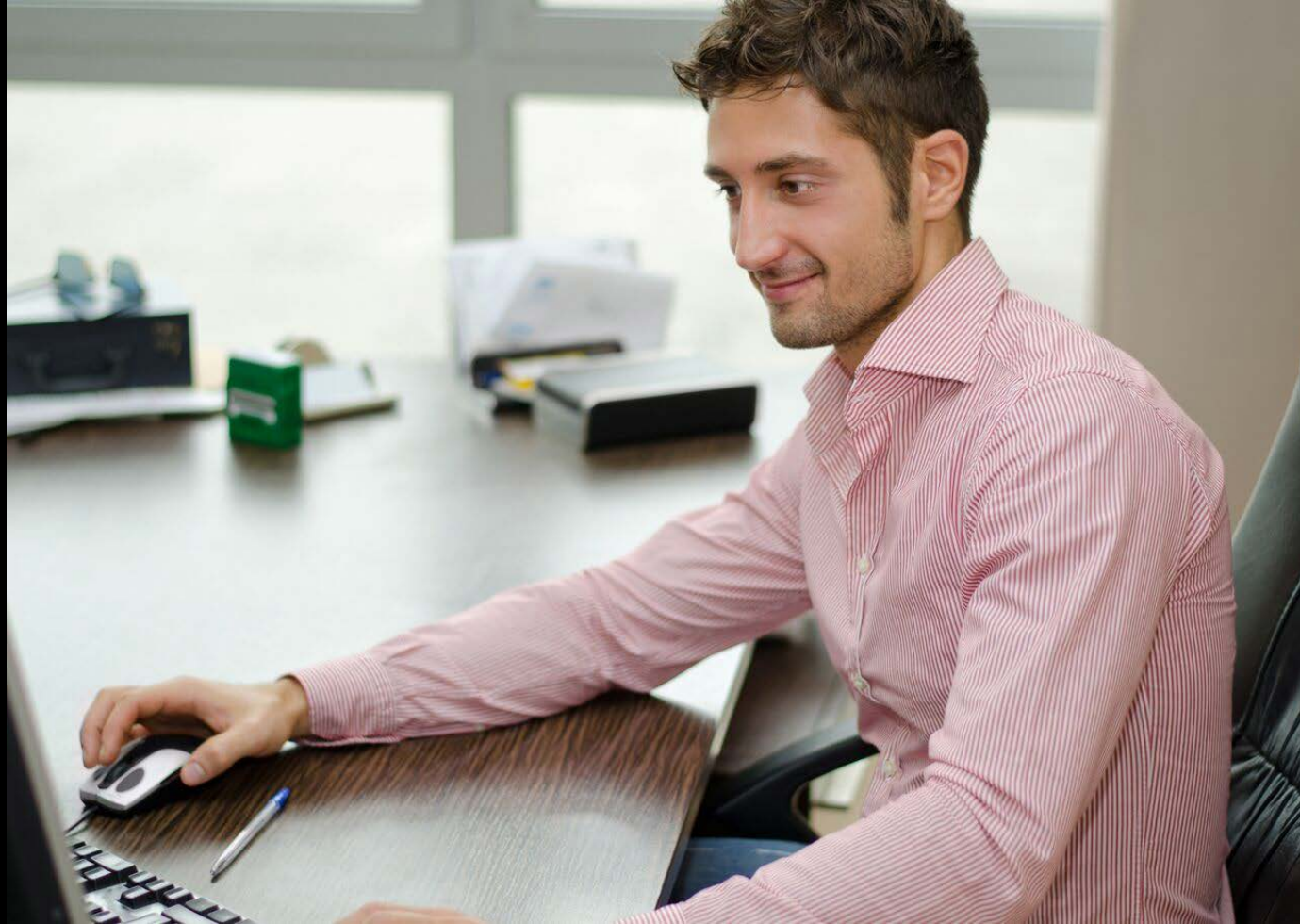
Workplace Affairs



Workplace Affairs



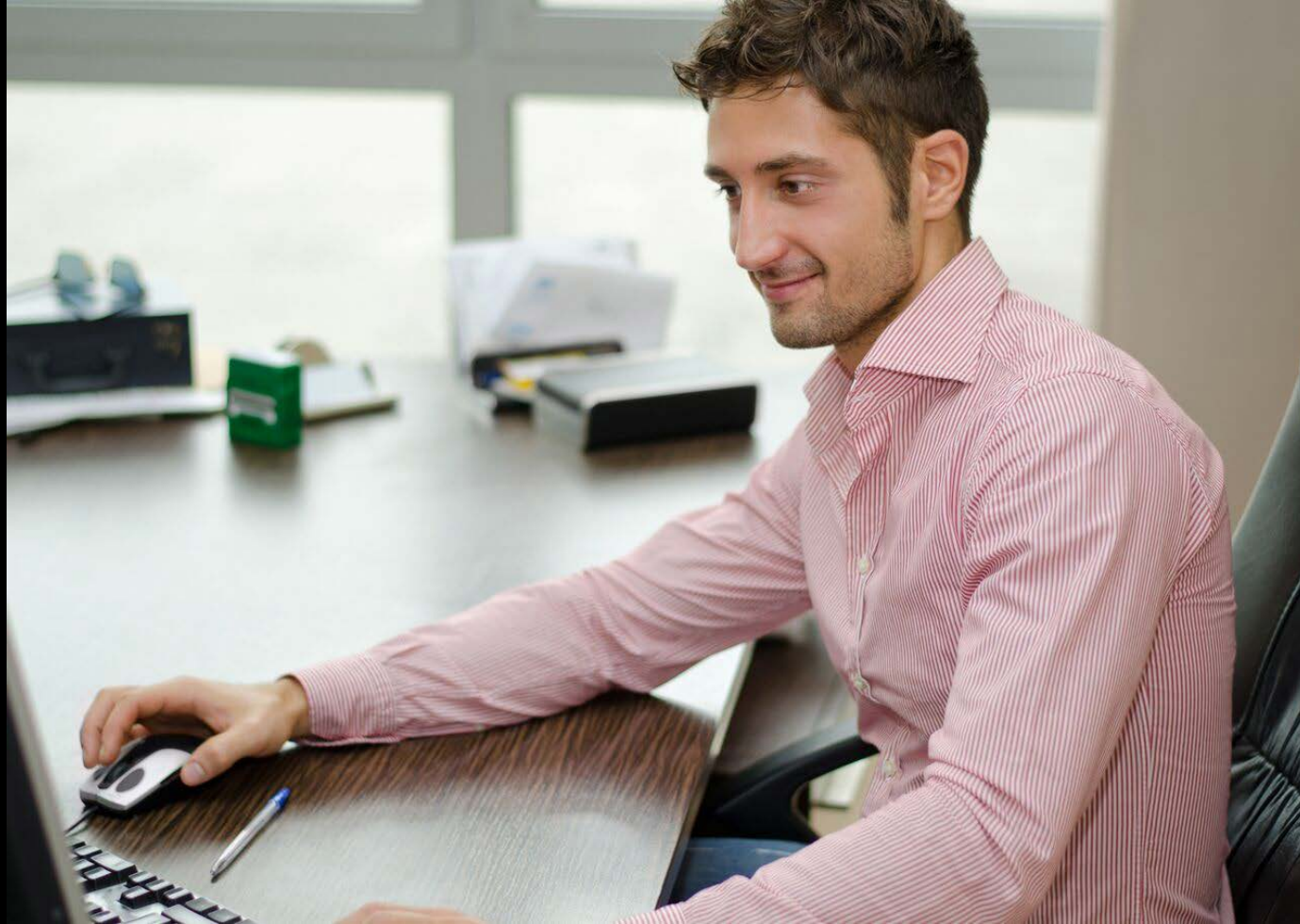
Workplace Affairs



Workplace Affairs



Workplace Affairs



Feedback

In this instance, the manager is accepting the reality of the affair and is offering the involved parties possible solutions to the situation.

The key message to get across is that you are not trying to interfere in their personal life but that you are trying to ensure that their relationship has no impact on the working environment and other employees.



Arguments

Is this really my business?



Arguments



What counts as an argument?

Well for starters, it is more than a mere difference of opinion. Differences of opinion are good for us; arguments are not. An argument may involve the following:

- **Raised voices**
- **Personal insults**
- **Violence**

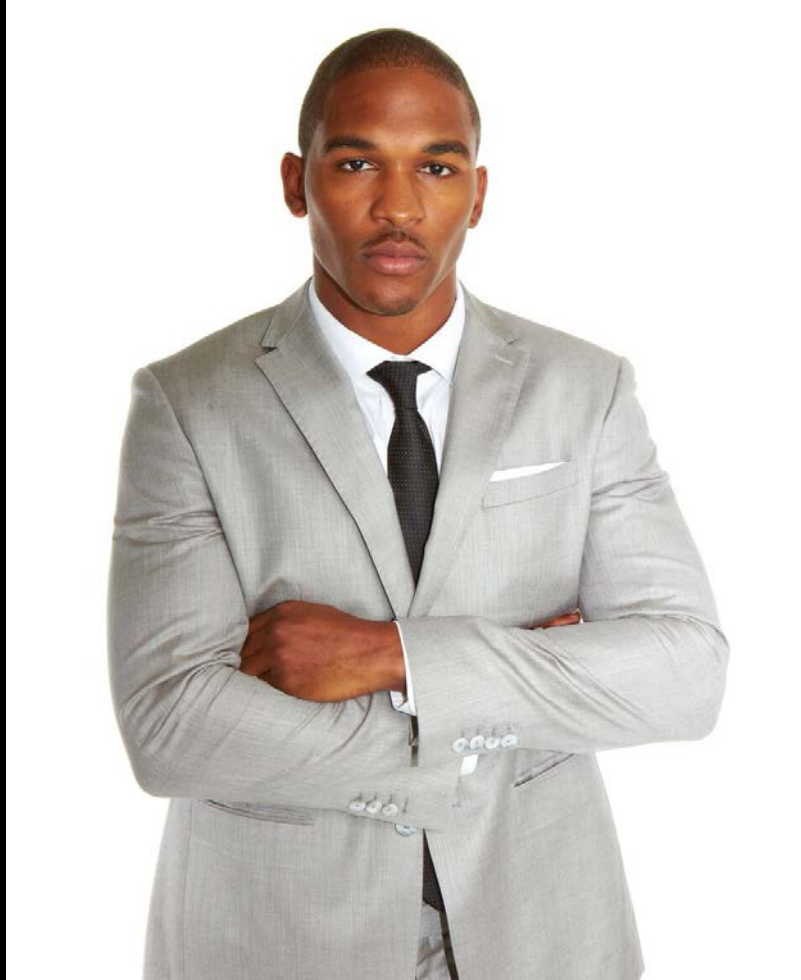
Arguments



So why is discussing arguments between colleagues potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because emotions are likely to be running high
- Because the employee might feel it is an intrusion into their private life
- Because the employee might be feel that they are being treated unfairly
- Because if you don't deal with it correctly it might escalate
- Because other employees might be affected

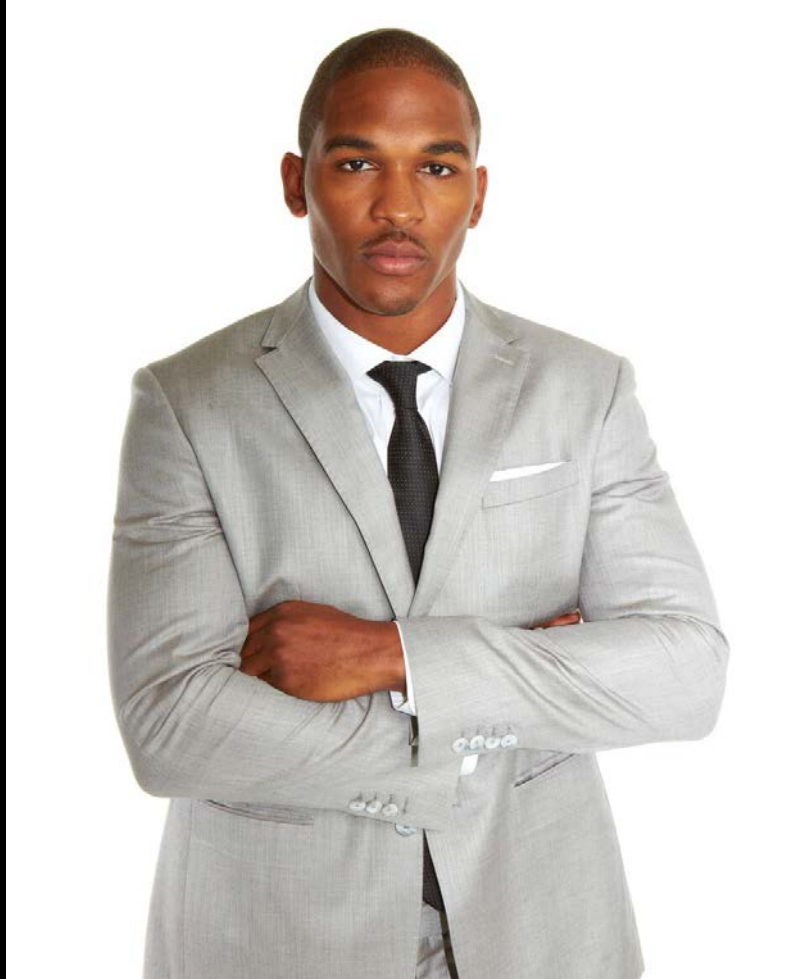
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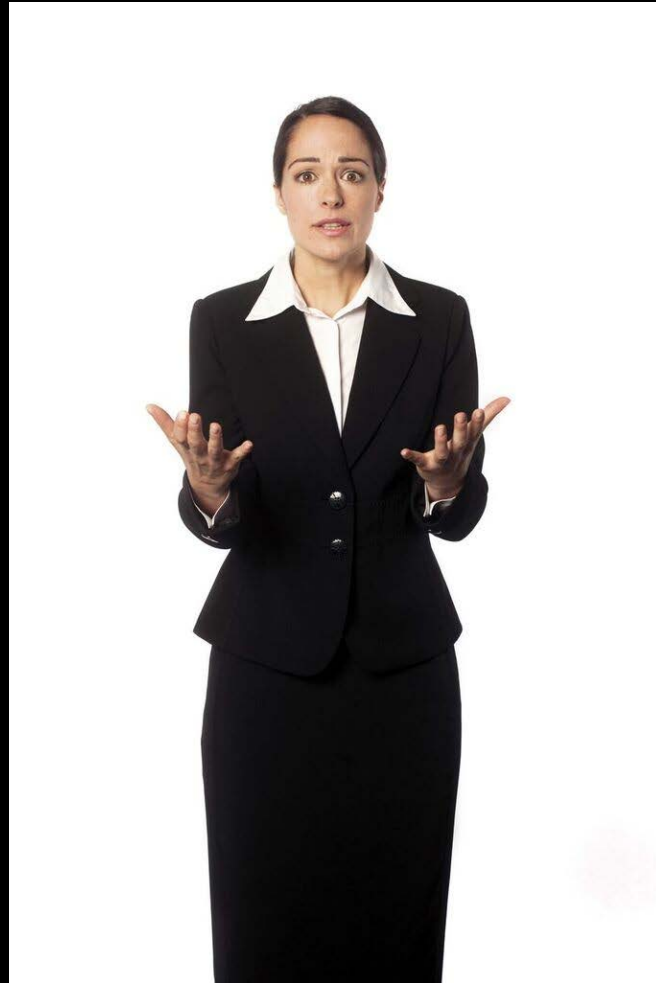
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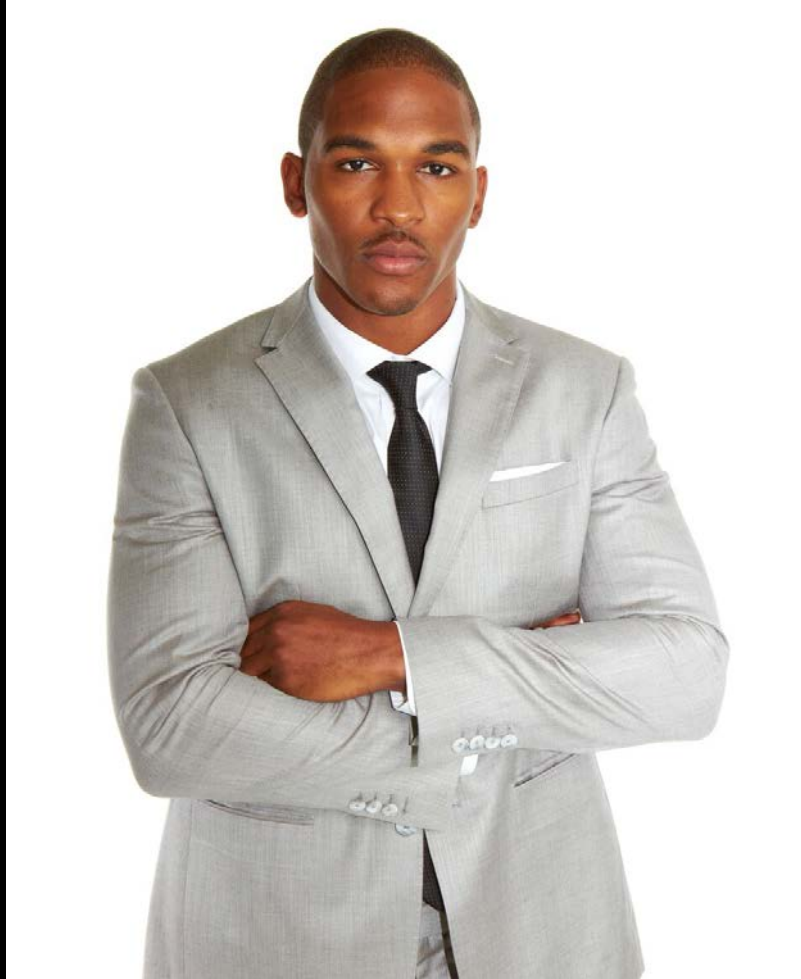
Arguments



Arguments



Arguments



Feedback

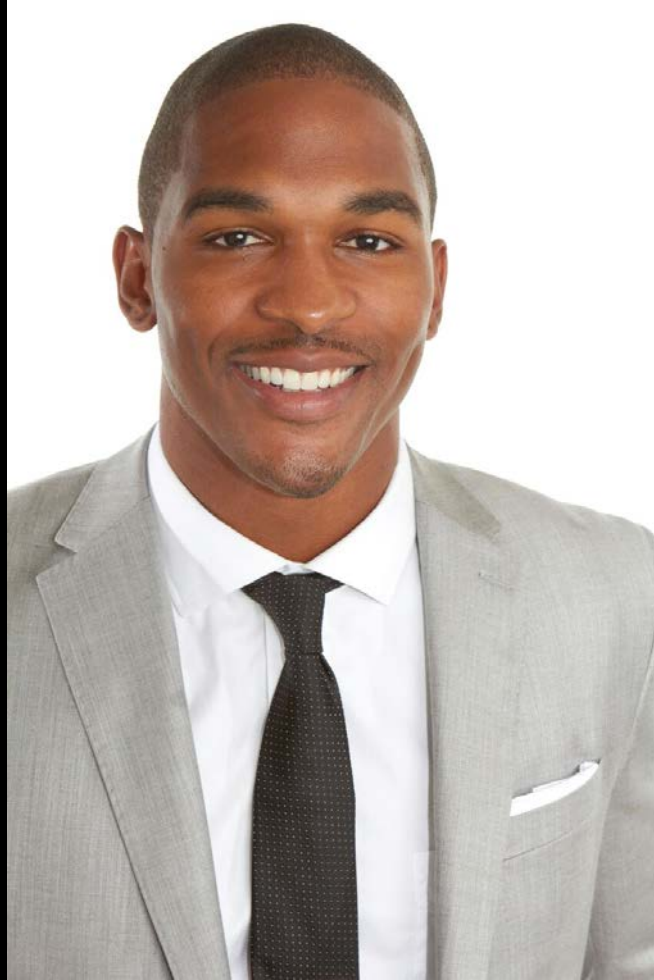
The manager is too focused on telling the employee off for their behavior.

Whilst there may be a need to be a telling off, it is also important to identify what caused the argument in the first place.

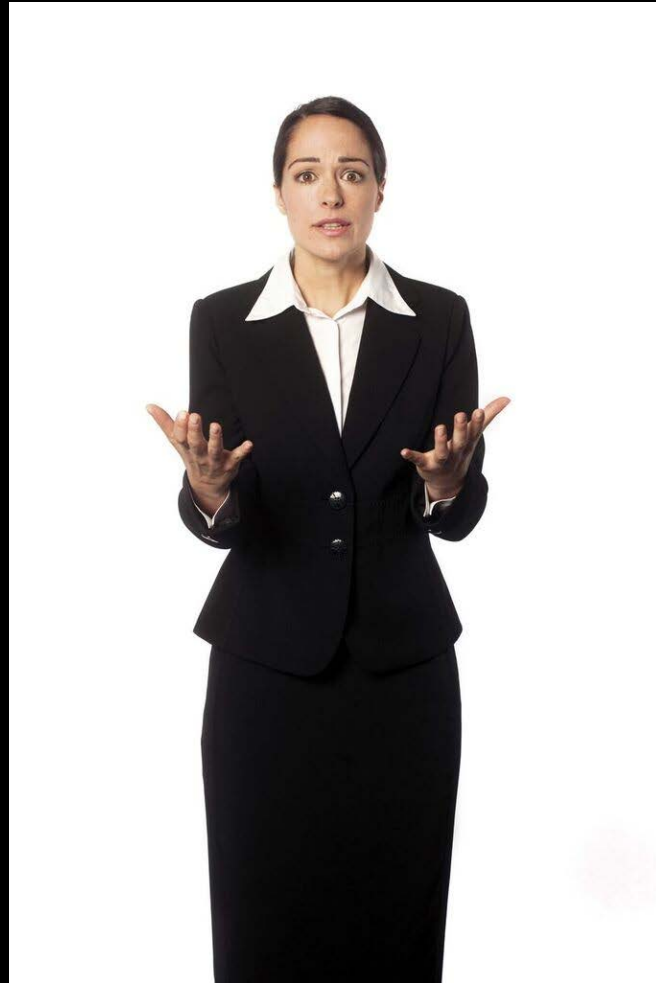
If the cause of the argument is not dealt with properly then there will be another row and next time it might be worse.



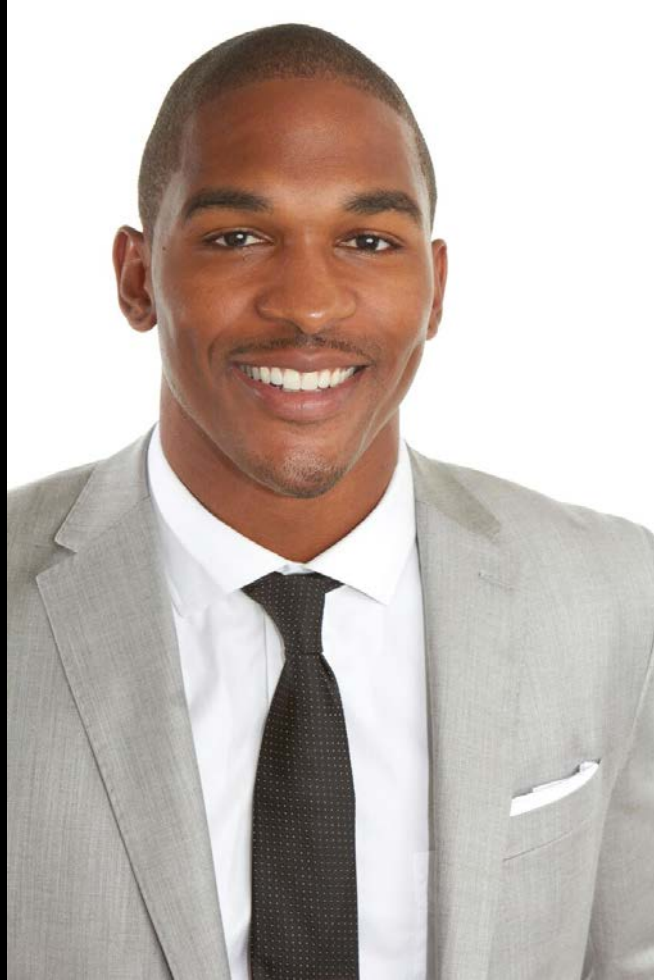
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Arguments



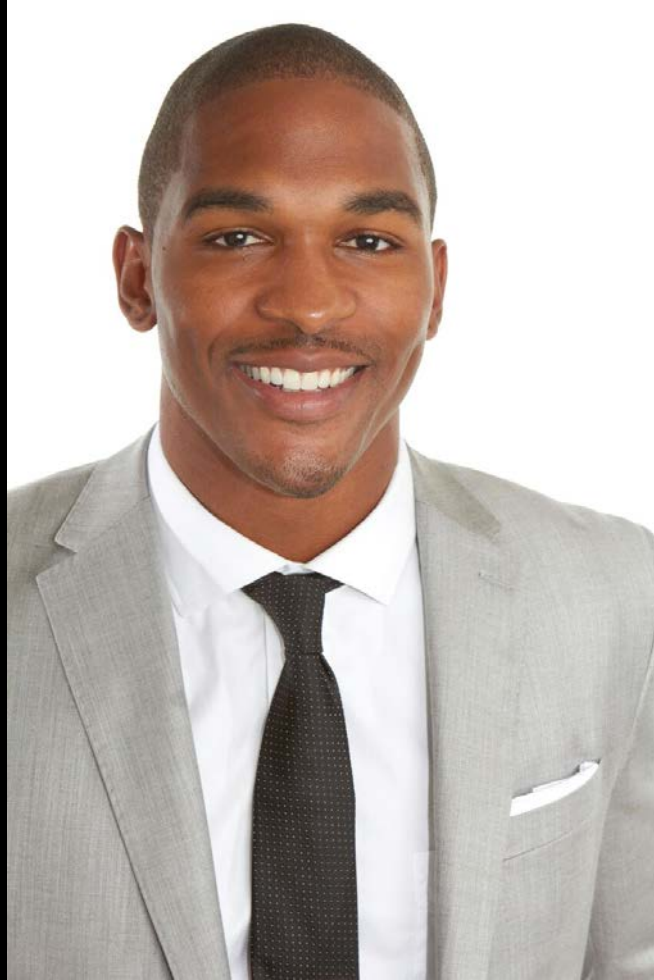
Arguments



Arguments



Arguments



Feedback

The manager is actually listening to the employee.

By enabling the employee to speak, it is clear that the situation was potentially caused by an underlying issue i.e. that of bullying.

The manager is now in a position to try and resolve the real issue.



Bullying and Harassment

Are we back in school?



Bullying and Harassment



Depending on the country you live in, there may be an extensive legal definition.

Very simply though, bullying is picking on someone and harassment is subjecting a person to unwanted attention in a manner that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Bullying and Harassment



So why is discussing bullying and harassment potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because emotions are likely to be running high

Now this one really depends on whether the employee is the accused, the accuser or a witness.

- The employee might be worried about their job
- The employee might be worried about repercussions
- The employee might not want to get involved

Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Feedback

Telling an employee that it is 'just banter' and that they should not be 'so sensitive' is not appropriate.

The manager needs to learn empathy and be proactive to deal with this situation.

Bullying and harassment can result in long term absences, can cause a loss of company reputation and most dreadfully, does occasionally result in suicides.



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying and Harassment



Feedback

The manager has used an understanding approach, which has encouraged the employee to talk and has allowed the manager to gather the information they need to decide whether or not to start a formal investigation.

By involving the employee in the decision about how to resolve the situation, the employee feels both valued and supported.



Personal Hygiene

Is it really my job to deal with this?



Personal Hygiene



What do we mean when we talk about personal hygiene?

Generally we are talking about how clean someone keeps their body and their clothes.

The first indication that someone has an issue is usually that they will emit unsavoury odours; in other words they smell.



Personal Hygiene



So why is discussing personal hygiene potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because the employee or you might be embarrassed
- Because the employee might not realise they have a problem
- Because the employee might get upset
 - They might worry that everyone has been talking about them
- Because there might be a medical issue which is causing the problem

Personal Hygiene



Personal Hygiene



Personal Hygiene



Feedback

Thanks to the manager's approach, the employee feels embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated and paranoid that everyone has been talking about him.



Personal Hygiene



Personal Hygiene



Personal Hygiene



Personal Hygiene



Feedback

Whilst the employee is still a bit embarrassed, the manager's approach has kept such embarrassment to a minimum and the employee feels supported rather than humiliated.



Appearance

Does anyone really care?



Appearance



What do we mean by appearance?

Appearance is how we look.

This includes everything from what clothes we are wearing through to makeup, jewellery, hair colour, piercings, tattoos, facial hair, teeth and general tidiness and cleanliness.



Appearance



So why is discussing appearance potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because the employee might get very offended
 - They may view your comments as an attack on their personal identity
- Because the employee might genuinely not understand what the issue is
- Because the employee might get upset
- Because the employee might not be able to afford to replace their wardrobe

Appearance



Appearance



Appearance



Appearance



Appearance



Feedback

This was a personal attack and has left the employee understandably very upset.



Appearance



Appearance



Appearance



Appearance



Feedback

The employee has a much clearer understanding of why they cannot dress for work in the manner that they have been doing.

The manager has handled this in a tactful and sensitive manner.



Religion

How much do you really believe in equality?



Religion



What do we mean by religion?

A religion is generally a reference to a group of people who have a belief in a controlling power. It often manifests as a belief in an entity that is believed to affect the nature and purpose of the world in which we live.

There are many different religions and belief systems. Many have specific worship and devotional requirements.

Religion



So why is discussing religion and the requirements of the religion a potentially a sensitive topic?

- Because offence might easily be caused
 - The employee might feel they are being unfairly treated
 - You might not understand the employee's religious obligations
- Because perceived religious obligations might clash with perceived business needs
- Because not everyone is tolerant of people with a different belief system

Religion



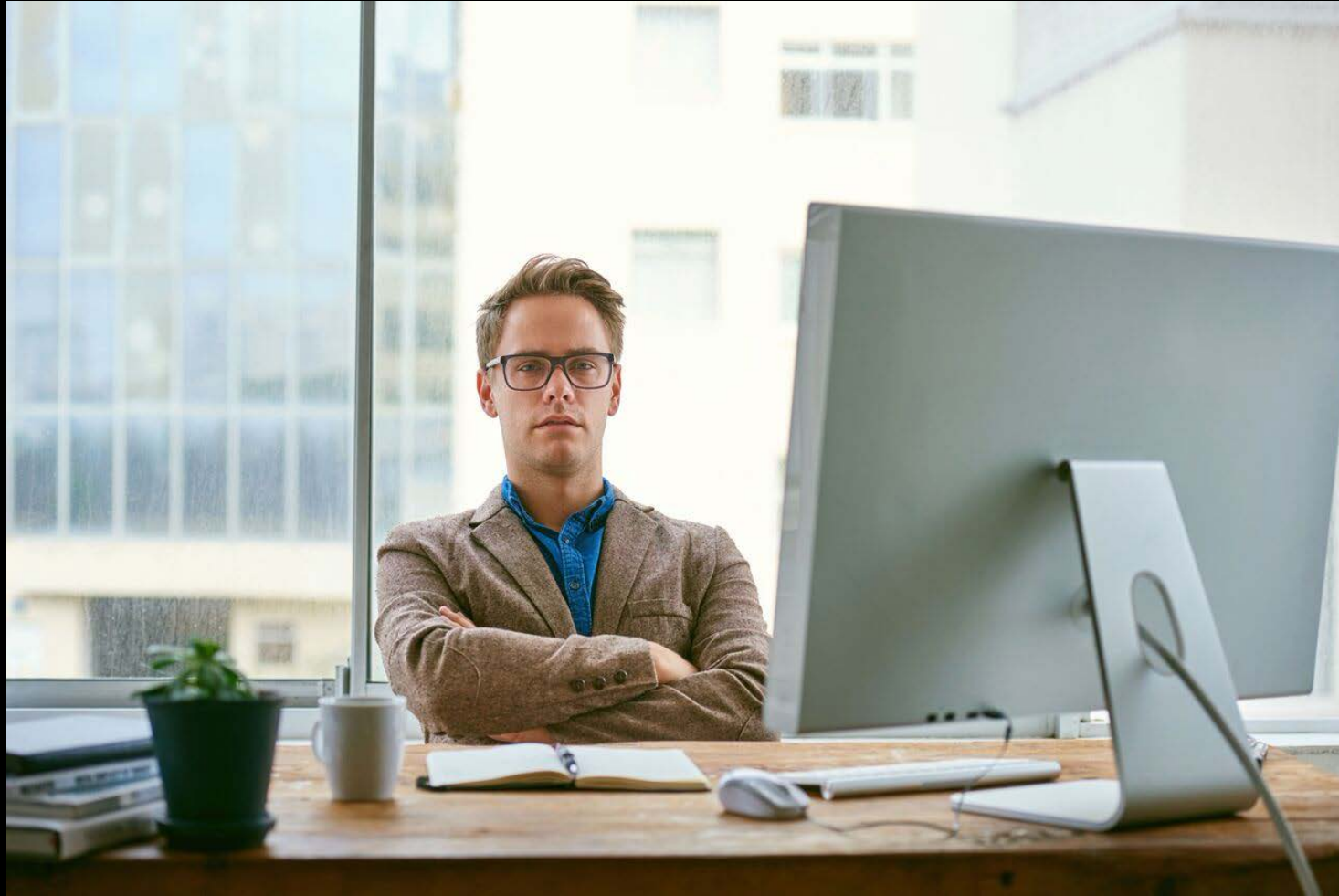
Religion



Religion



Religion



Religion



Feedback

The manager showed a complete lack of respect for the person's religious beliefs and obligations, whilst expecting their own to be acknowledged.

In the UK this would potentially be illegal discrimination and the company might get sued on the grounds of religious discrimination.



Religion



Religion



Religion



Religion



Feedback

By having an open conversation with the employee about their religious beliefs and obligations, the manager has gained a better understanding of the situation and appreciates that the employee is not being awkward.

The employee feels that their religious beliefs are not being disrespected and ignored.



Summary



We have tried to give you an overview of some of the difficult conversations that you, as a manager, might have to have with other managers and employees.

The topics discussed are relevant in the workplace and when mismanaged cause disruption and can cost the business money.

By managing these topics properly you will support the individuals where appropriate, create a friendlier workplace and cause minimum disruption to the business.

