

Transcription - Peer Manager Complaint Part 2

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're going to look at the flip side of a case study that we did earlier in the year where we talked about peer management complaints.

So previously we talked about how someone from your team went to a peer manager of yours to complain about you and your management style. Today, we're going to talk about how you feel when you find out that this has happened. So we're looking at it from your point of view, you're the one that the complaint has been made about and you have now found out that one of your team has gone to a peer manager, so someone at the same level of management in your organisation and made this complaint about your management style. Now let's hear from Fulyana and I'll give you my views as she talks.

I think any human would be reacting to this. It won't be a good thing to find out, it won't be good to know that one of your people, when they're not happy with you, is going to talk about you with someone else. So you would feel uncomfortable, you would feel unhappy with the person who said it, and you immediately go on the defensive and denial in your head, I imagine, then anger. That's understandable, that's human, that's normal.

Now, I think that's when you've just got to step up and say, okay, how do I handle this? Where do I go from here? This is the important bit. Process the other feelings first and then what I would do is say, I'm gonna try two categories, one - this person is just a troublemaker and a gossip and they're really not fair and I'm sick of them or whatever. So that's category one. Category two is just a normal person who is, I don't know why they felt the way they did and did what they did, but they seem normal and reasonable most of the time.

For both of those scenarios, I would use the same approach. It is hard, and it is hard to execute, but help yourself by saying, I want to know why, and I want to understand why, and then I want to address it. So you go to the person and you say "look I'm sorry to hear that you're not happy with my style and you approached someone else". At that point the person is going to freeze. They're going to think, I didn't want you to know, now there's a confrontation coming, whether they are category one or two. So address that first by saying "there's no conflict here, I have heard that information". The first thing I want to do is to say I apologize that you felt you had to go somewhere else and not talk to me directly. And this is the way I'm approaching this. This is the way I'm trying to understand so that I don't put you in that situation where you have to go somewhere else.

That's very very hard to say and do because you would be thinking, why am I doing that. they're in the wrong. But, in both categories, this will work because you're coming in and you're not blaming, accusing and confronting. What you're doing is saying, whatever I did or the situation is that caused you to do that, I'm sorry. Can we talk about it? Can we do that? Set the scene a sensible discussion and mood. It will allow you to relax that person and allow them to be as honest as they should be.

If I was sitting in the employee side, I could be thinking I don't trust this political speech. But even if I thought that, I would think, well hang on a minute now it's time to play my bit. So I could say well yes I should have come to you but I didn't because my experience in the past is that you get angry when I come to talk to you or not my experience but I heard it from others that they tried that and it didn't work. I genuinely wanted things to work, so I went to seek help from someone, I just happen to know that person I worked with them before or whatever.

This is where you get to the bit where how much of it is real direct experience. How much is that you might be oblivious to the fact that you are maybe unapproachable, angry or whatever. Now you've got to see it from other people's eyes. If it's totally fabricated and made-up, it's not nice, but it's a great opportunity because then you can just say well I really, really appreciate your honesty. From now on let me tell you how I'd like to correct that by saying, please approach me, maybe my best time is such and such, use some of the tools around you to help them find that out and then just put some triggers in place. You can say when you have time I need to talk to you about something, just you and me. Then the person will go away and think, okay that's all we agreed, that's the trigger. I'll say that and then he/she will fit me in. So agree, something at the end is when, how to approach, how to signal that I just want to talk to you about something to do with leadership or style, something like that.

A couple of things occur to me during that about when is there value in having someone independent in that interaction. When is there value to both parties in having someone independent and if there is, how do you choose and who chooses?

Good thinking. I tend to think that I wouldn't do it in the first instance only because to me that's immediately escalating it. However, you make a good point so let's say I'm the manager and I came in with absolutely good intentions and approached it the way I said before "I'm sorry you felt you had to go somewhere

else" and the person is really nervous. You're trying to relax them so just say if you're uncomfortable and you'd like someone to be with you, we can arrange that. But I don't want to do it immediately simply because it's escalating the situation. So if you do that as a manager, you'd most likely bring in Human Resources because that's who you would be asking and the person will bring in whoever they want into the meeting, normally as an observer. It might get to that and it might be that both parties need that because there is more history, it's not the first time or whatever. If you try to resolve it one on one with the good intention and swallowing pride a lot, I think it might be the very first step, but if it looks uncomfortable, yes, absolutely bring someone else.

What about the manager that heard the complaint initially to be a facilitator, not to be a part of the discussion? Depends on who they are and what role they play. Obviously, the person that the employee went to is the person that they feel comfortable with. When the manager has different feelings about that person, that person is no longer independent for both. It's like having your lawyer and not my lawyer sort of thing. You might be better off getting someone who is independent altogether and most organisations have access to that. Or you might both say who would you be comfortable with? And then you say, we both have to be comfortable and make it happen. Just have a list of two or three. The thing with that is it's making it messy because you're not following what the organization has in place.

My biggest insight into this arena is keeping it not personal. Not making it about you as an individual and not making it about the other person individually. And that is very hard to do. The same as well as when you're, as a manager, talking to someone about their performance, it's not about them as a person, it's about what they're doing. And in this instance, we have to try as best we can to keep the personal out of it and be totally accurate. Let's let's get the facts down, let's get how you feel, how I feel, what led to the situation and talk about the facts not about how you feel. How you feel comes in to it later and how you feel might be a reaction to not knowing all the facts, not having all of the information, taking hearsay rather than doing an investigation, all of those things.

So try and keep it not personal. Focus on the facts, focus on the things that seem to be causing a block or an irritation. And then agree on how to approach each of those. If you've got someone who doesn't like the way communication happens in the team and there is not way of having information shared with everyone in the team. So some people have more power because they have more information and we spoke about in team meetings and nothing's happened, nothing has changed. And so you've gone to another team and said

to their manager, how do you do it in your team because in our team it doesn't work? Not really a complaint so much about the manager as it is about the dynamic of the team and about the process within the team. Going back to the person who leads the team where the problem exists, by sitting down and saying communication doesn't work then you've got something factual that you can that you work on even though it has caused the reaction with somebody, you come back to how can we fix this issue that seems to be a problem that you've identified and felt that you couldn't fix it here.

Certainly have a reaction because if you stifle the reaction it will sit in your head making it difficult to have clear thoughts for a direction forward. It's not the end of the world. This is not a roadblock. This is just that someone has identified that there is a problem with the management style. Look at the facts, look at the conditions surrounding that management style and see if there are alternatives or ways to move forward, that are co-operative, that bring everyone in to the solution, because as I say so often if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.

That's perfect on that point, that example you use is about the communication. It's not working in my team, but then I go somewhere else and it's working. Again, it's how you present that information. You could just say a couple of things we could consider, one way would be to do ABC, one way to do that. As you said, come in with a suggested solution and they can be tailored for your team by everyone. It's how you delivery it as well, it's not saying ours is not working, theirs is, he's got much better leadership. That becomes personal and like you said stick to the facts, stick to the solution. The issue is communication, what we've got can be done better. Here is another three ways, suggestions, let's talk them through and see which one is best for us. Focusing on that factual situation and looking at the solutions, writing it down so that you get it clear and out of your head and makes the communication easier. It also means that someone who is being a nuisance is identified and we have to be realistic there are those in organisations who want to find problems, they think that makes them important.

There is benefit to both sides out of this but you do have to find a method for getting the personal out of it as hard as that is. We've both been in that situation and I will say it's not easy, I still have personal reaction when it happens. But I know that it's a personal reaction and I know that I have to work past that to find a solution.

That is the hard part is because when a person is saying you get angry when I

come to ask you this and the first thing you think of nobody else reacts that way, it's because you constantly come into my office going blah blah blah. That's when you start attacking each other, which will really get you nowhere, it only creates a bigger division between you two. So that is hard and I still have to say that it's every single person's responsibility but I'll give it a little bit more to the leader because the leader has to set that example and be above it. Listen, listen to find a solution and keep it about the issues not about the person as you said and then if there is a real issue with this person and they're just a troublemaker, then you've done everything right up to now, then you have to deal with that situation in the normal way, whether it's performance management or normal reviews, follow your process, give them every chance to be solution oriented.

We might leave it there. I think we've thrown all the ideas we can think of at you. If you have experienced this, as we said with the previous podcast on this topic, we would be delighted to hear from you and share your views and experience with our listeners. For now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.