

Transcription - Case Study - Unprofessional Peer Behaviour

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we've got a case study for you and it's an interesting one in that, before we started recording, we actually had a long conversation about the term we would use about the behavior that is the topic of this case study. We've come up with "unprofessional" because it's actually going to cover, I will tell you the specific example, but we know that it covers a whole lot of other behaviors that would be classified as unprofessional in any environment.

The case study that came to me today is about the hospitality industry, is about a venue where there are a couple of people who are dedicated bar staff, work behind the bar and the rest of the staff work, it's a theatre restaurant, so the rest of the staff work on the floor doing customer service and wait staff as well. All get on really well, all very happy in the environment, love the work, love the place, all those sorts of things. We have one person who is on the floor staff and just a general hand, so helps out everywhere. He has observed that one of the bar staff, the dedicated bar staff, is drinking on the job during the shift continuously, just has the glass ready at the back of the bar and works on it and refills it during the shift. The question now is, how does he address that situation, given that they are both essentially working at the same level within the organisation, not two different sections and there's not two different managers, there is two owners and there's no other level of management in between.

That's what we would consider unprofessional behaviour and that obviously is in terms of drinking, but it might be all sorts of other unprofessional behaviors as well.

It's tricky because you can't ignore it firstly, which is the easy way. It's not my problem, I'm not in charge here and leave it. But the fact that you noticed it means that you care about the situation and the person and it would be good if you try to do something about it. I guess to approach the person and be very prepared when you approach them. It's got to be private and it's got to be respectful obviously and it's got to be in a caring way. Just say, "Oh, I might be wrong here, but I've noticed..", or, "Can I just have a quiet chat" and make sure it is private. It's got to be " I might be wrong here, but I noticed this is happening". Right? And then see the reaction.

The reaction, be prepared. Be very prepared. It could be denial, mind your own business, who do you think you are, I don't know, you're imagining. It could be anything like that or it could be, "Oh, so what are you going to do about it? Report me?" So be prepared for any reaction. Obviously there is some root cause there, somewhere. You're not a psychologist, you're just a concerned peer and keep it that way. Just say, "Look, I just care, are you okay? Is everything okay? I've noticed that and the only reason I'm raising it was I care and because I'm really worried about what could happen, because it's alright now, nothing is affecting your work. So at the moment I haven't noticed anything that is, you know, untoward or anything like that. But what concerns me from my experience, people that go on that track sometimes kind of go wrong. I'm not saying it will be you, but because of that I'm just here to say, is everything okay?"

And to me, I think that's a big step. It's hard for the person raising it and the person receiving

it, but it at least it is registered. It registered that for the person who is drinking, will start thinking somebody noticed. If he noticed, somebody else noticed, I can't just pretend nobody knows. So that will trigger that first good step. And for the person who's raising it, the case study, the owner, that person then has done what they should do and have done. And then see how it unfolds.

I think that the opening phrase is the thing that you really have to think about. It's about focusing on them, not about what you know. So it's the lines of, are you okay, Is everything all Just that genuine concern and nothing more. And certainly not, can I absolutely warn people, not saying, "I haven't said anything to anyone else, but", because that is red rag. Almost certainly the other person is going to hear you saying I'm threatening you, I'm going to tell someone else. Already they're on the defensive and they will not hear anything else that you say. They won't believe any other genuine interest, interest that you've got in the situation. Then you're going to say, well, it's about that simple opening phrase. If you say, is everything okay? And they say, yeah, no problem at all, then you just, you've got to step back and you've got to say, okay, well, I've tried. And maybe it's that you, every time you notice it, that sometimes during that shift or whenever, you repeat it so that they understand that you've still got your eye on them. Maybe sometimes they don't know. Sometimes they haven't noticed. Sometimes it's just, I had a bad morning, I've had a bad day, whatever else it is, I'll have a quick hit. It's socially acceptable and all the things that are wrong with drinking in this country, we can't address all of those issues, but we can individually make a difference for some people about how they're dealing with situations. Saying, is everything okay? Are you okay? It's focusing on that one to one interaction, not a work interaction.

I think that's the area that is of most concern in this particular situation. If we broaden it out to other "unprofessional" behaviors, it might be language. One of the things that we talked about before we started recording was that we were using the word "inappropriate" behavior. The word "inappropriate", at this point in time, generally means to people that it's a sexual harassment. And that might be the case. There's a whole way of dealing with that, that is this far more structured. But if we talk about "unprofessional", we talk about language and we talk about being in a situation where you are in an enclosed group perhaps and not interacting with anyone other than your work colleagues, and when you get frustrated and you get irritated by situations, whether it's angry with yourself or angry with a bit of software that isn't working, and I know that I have that issue and I work predominantly alone. I'll confess that in the last fortnight, I got so frustrated with a bit of software that I slammed a mouse down on desk and broke it in half.

Oh, that's not like you.

Completely inappropriate behavior, but you know, unprofessional behavior, very unprofessional behavior. All that meant was that I had to go out and I had to go to the expense of getting a new mouse, but you know, I thought, there were consequences. I understand that situations can drive you to being what you consider unprofessional. You have to recognize that those situations occur. That's in terms of your own management, but it's about how someone working alongside of you manages or deals with that situation.

This is a good example. If you were in a group, rather than on your own, that could be seen

as aggression and one off is one off. But it also could be the tone and the volume of the tone and the physical presence too. Sometimes when a person is maybe much taller and you know, looking down, whatever, it might look more aggressive with the loud voice than the person is and realize they are. So that can be seen as unprofessional. The way to address that is very similar to what we said. So if it's one off, like you, Kim, if I saw you do that, I'd say, "Oh gosh, what happened there? That's not like you", which I just said, right?

And then you said, "I've just had enough with this technology because I've been working on it for a week, okay, whatever." In other cases, when they say the loud voice and coming across as intimidating or aggressive, but not meaning to, then you say, "I don't know if you realize, and I'm sure you don't mean it, but you're coming across..." So, again, probably, are just scared about your reputation, because I know you're better than that. And I don't want people to see you as what you're looking like rather than what you are. And again, I care about you. I'm here to help rather than judge or threaten you.

And there's also situations where people will exhibit that sort of unprofessional behavior where they don't see anything wrong with it. Now, the example I'll give is that a person that we both worked with, although I was physically working closer with this fellow than Fulyana was. She was in an office sort of around the corner we used to say, because the building was round, so everyone was around the corner. He was a professional in his phone manner when he was talking to people, but he obviously would get frustrated with people on the phone. You couldn't tell it in his demeanor or his voice, but he would, because it was a physical handset, he would slam the phone down at the end of the conversation.

And in the end, I said to him, "Why do you do that?" He said, "Well, they don't know that I'm slamming the phone down, they don't hear it, and it helps me get over the situation."

So for me, there was nothing more I could say. I couldn't say, "Well, it's upsetting me because I have to hear it and if I'm on the phone to someone, they're going to hear you slam it down the phone and know that it's you that slammed it down." At that stage, I was much younger and I couldn't think of a way to address it that wasn't confrontational with him. In the greater scheme of things it didn't really matter. If it made him feel better and made him manage himself better throughout the day, then that was a good solution.

I just always struck me as interesting that he was the mild-mannered professional man, but when he got frustrated with someone, he didn't take it out on them. He took it out on the phone. That was actually a good release.

You addressed it, but again, other people around you may have had a different view. If they, if it started affecting them, then he had to think about, and I reckon he would have got that because he was thoughtful to the other end of the phone person. So people, if he's annoying or disturbing or stressing people in the wings, he would do it, you know, and find another way.

The other example I have is more about judging a situation visually and not getting it right. Now my youngest son, when he was early teenage, so 12, 13, he was very much taller than anybody else around. He's over six foot now. As teenage boys do, they would go out, we're talking half a dozen of them, and just hang around the shops and talk and just be out and about and pretending they were big men of the world. On a number of occasions, so more than once, he was asked to move on by security in a shopping centre because they considered that he was exhibiting bullying and intimidating behaviour. It was simply because he used to have to bend down to talk to other people. To them, you know, without them

looking at the group or interacting with the group, they made a value judgment on what he was doing, on his behaviour, based on physicality.

So, I think with any situation you have to investigate it a little bit further and think about what is making it unprofessional in that environment and how you can address it, particularly if it's peer-to-peer, how you address it on a personal level rather than a professional level. Now, if in the event that you feel part of the response indicates that you should take it further, that you should report it, what are the next steps then?

Well, I think I'm glad you asked that because if it comes into safety whether it is intimidation or safety because drinking on the job or anything, so it's not that you can just let it go, right? I think you do your very, very best to talk to the person about, look, why don't you do something about it, there is things that the organisation can do to help, for example, you could maybe do counselling, employee assistance programme, whatever. I'm sure there's always something that can help, but encourage support and be the person there to encourage them to go and deal with it themselves with management in this case, right?

If it needs to be taken to that next step. If they refuse, in denial and tell you to mind your own business and you're still concerned about safety, don't stop there. Just tell them, look, I really think it's so much better coming from you, I'm here to help you not to report anything, but I'm really, really worried about safety, and say exactly what the safety issue is. I'm going to be honest with you, I'm going to have to do it, if you're not doing it, I'll have to do it. Then report it, because if something goes wrong, you know, and you've done everything right up till now, you would be comfortable with yourself. You know what I mean, that you didn't prevent something. So you do it, but you need to do something about it. And then the person themselves, you saved them in that sense, from getting to that point, and the person who's coming up, maybe a bully who's not a bully, you've got the record straight, right? I got them to see that they're giving the wrong image about themselves, when you could ruin their reputation.

Just in terms of thinking about people getting the wrong image, when I was a teenager, my nickname was Stoneface, because for a long time I didn't show any reactions, and I didn't interact with people. I wasn't a great talker in those days, still not socially, I'm not big on whole inane conversation, but it wasn't until I really felt like that was unfair, that I addressed it to the group and said, "I know that you all call me this when you're having the interactions, and I just want to make it clear that the reason I don't say anything is because in my mind, I've got nothing to contribute, that you've all covered the conversation, or that I am so unused to sharing my emotions, which is a result of my upbringing, that I don't show emotions on my face, and a lot of the time in my work, it's better that I don't show an emotion on my face". Just, you know, to clear the air.

What you're saying is sometimes the situation like that gives you the opportunity to set the record straight about it, or sometimes for people to see you differently, like you just did, and then these people start thinking differently, rather than, you were called that, and then everybody just joins in and accepts it, nobody really looked for the facts, right? It makes me think about other, particularly nicknames, and things otherwise they've categorised people without thinking about it too much. I don't think anybody that knows me will be surprised

about this example I'm going to give, but it was in a group, I was in charge of this team, and I know that they called me "the dragon" and behind my back. I found it amusing. But then there was one of the guys in the team who was very good at doing signs, so he was doing signs for people's desks and that. I walked up to him and on the quiet, and I said, "Can you make me a sign please?" And he said, "Yeah", so I said "can you just put a dragon on it?" And he nearly died, because they did not know that I knew, and he didn't know, and I said, "Oh please, honestly," I had a big smile on my face, and he could tell I wasn't angry. And he did it, and I put it on my desk. The reaction was unbelievable, because people were both, "Oh God, does she know it's me that I said it, that I actually do call it that? She's going to say something". But at the end of the day, all it did was they could see that I had a sense of humor. That was it, that was the end of it, that name wasn't important anymore to anyone.

And it didn't change the way that you treated them, the way you managed them.

No, no, no, because you know, to me these things don't really matter. If I just went and asked who's calling me that, then I'm just proving it, it's just confrontation and unnecessary. So again, sometimes responding, and I don't think they really were being mean, like just, "She's pretty hard, or whatever", at the end of the day, owning it and doing something about it in a very good manner, professional manner.

The other thing I was trying to think of, is their value in this case study that we we're talking about, is there value in the person who has noticed the issue, offering to go with the other person to talk about it?

Yes, I think that support person, I think that would be helpful because if the person agrees, they might feel that this person is on my side, and he really cares, and I'm helping. That might encourage them, definitely that's a very good point.

And in terms of the management, they're looking at that being an issue that's brought to them, is it better to have the support person there? Someone else from the team who is seeing the issue, rather than the person with the problem going on their own?

I think if I was in the management of that group, I would see it as a positive because I would think these team members are looking at for each other. It's not us and them. Yeah, there's none of that. It's my responsibility as a management to help them now.

We thank the listener who provided us with that case study. I won't name him because he doesn't wish that to be the case, but I think we have looked at "unprofessional" behaviour and I think from what we've talked about, you can relate that to experiences that you might be having. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.