

A Question of Commitment - Conclusion

The new leader received advice from his peers that included...

- Intervene soon - you can't let the problem continue longer, especially if others are noticing.
- Include your boss - it is never wise to surprise the boss, and you need to know where s/he stands on this.
- Connect with HR - be sure you understand relevant policies and procedures, your authority, and be open to their advice.
- Don't beat around the bush - be direct with your observations and expectations when you speak with her.
- Get her side of the story - listen to what she has to say, but be wary of "stories" she might have to excuse her behaviour.
- Seek a solution - set clear expectations for the future and be prepared to follow-up on whatever commitments are made, even consequences should the behaviour continue.

What do you think - would you have suggested anything else?

With his peers' suggestions in hand, the participant headed back to work confident he was ready to confront this issue. When the peer learning group reconvened, here's what he reported about his progress...

- He met with her just three days after the workshop - it was the first opportunity for both of them to get together, and frankly he was getting more upset the longer he waited.
- He had met with the boss - who was helpful and supportive, but perhaps a little less than he could have been because the new leader had not shared the full details of the situation, including who was having a problem, because he felt a need to "protect" her from unnecessary negative attention.
- Meeting with HR had also been helpful - though they too might have offered more had he shared more of the story with them, including the name of the individual with the problem.

But the best piece of advice, the one he really appreciated, was to listen. He was nervous going into the meeting, this being his first challenging conversation as a supervisor. So when she asked if she could talk about an issue she had before they got to his agenda, he gladly obliged. Here is the gist of what she said next...

"I have needed to bring this up for some time, but wanted to give you a chance to settle in. We really need to do something about my working hours (the new supervisor thought to himself, "Yes, we sure do!"). You see, when I returned to work last year from maternity leave, I came back as a .5, part-time employee. The old supervisor agreed to me working just mornings because he really needed my help, and because he understood I really

wanted to be with my children. We agreed that I would come in each morning, and then leave at lunch to get the oldest from school and the other children from day care.

Well you know how busy we've been, and I felt like I was letting the team down by leaving early. So most days I've stayed on to help out as long as I could. But I really can't do it any longer. Because I have to pay the babysitter for the extra time, the part-time pay is barely covering the cost of babysitting. And my husband is having trouble getting away to pick up the kids. My husband and I have discussed it. He wants to spend more time with the kids, and knows how much I love this job. So if you can arrange it, I'd like to come back full-time. The team really needs help, and my husband will adjust his schedule to work half time until the kids are a little older. I hate to be any trouble, but do you think we can make that work?"

The new supervisor admitted to being a little flabbergasted, and very happy he heard this before launching into his planned conversation to call her out on going home early. He had prepared to deal with a performance problem that looked like "low commitment", "absenteeism" and "poor team player", when what he really had on his hands was a very committed, high performer who was putting in extra time – for free. He learned a lot from this situation, but found out you can never learn enough as a leader.

Have you had something similar happen to you - believing and acting as if the situation was one way, when in reality it was another?

What are your lessons learned about leading from this case?

For some other thoughts, see our blog article "[Learn, then Lead](#)".