LEADING WITH EMPATHY

A practical guide for managers on how to become positive role models in the workplace and improve working relationships.

STAND UP SPEAK OUT

bristol.ac.uk/inclusion/stand-up-speak-out

MANAGERS ARE LEADERS

Staff look to managers for advice, support and leadership. As managers, we all have a responsibility to call out and challenge unacceptable behaviour in the workplace and support our staff who have experienced it. We must have the confidence to have difficult and uncomfortable conversations so that together, we can ensure our university is a positive place to work, where everyone can be themselves.

It is not our job to have all the answers, and nobody should be expected to deal with these situations alone, but it is important to lead with empathy and to try and understand each other's perspective so that we can support staff to find a solution and to take the appropriate action.

STAND UP SPEAK OUT

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

- It starts with us. We need to model positive behaviour in the workplace because staff look to us as an example of how to work with one another.

- We must **SEE**, **HEAR** AND **FEEL** each other's perspective so that we can all better understand the impact of our actions and comments and encourage our teams to do the same.

- Staff will not always have the confidence to speak about their experiences so as managers, we must be aware of the culture within our teams and be confident in addressing issues.

SEE

SEE: recognise unacceptable behaviour and the visible impact it can have on other members of the team and their attitude to work.

HEAR

HEAR: listen to what your staff are saying. What are the details? What can be evidenced?

FEEL

FEEL: how do your staff feel working in your team? How do you feel?

ACT

ACT: take appropriate action; do not ignore an incident or dismiss a staff member's experience.

LEAD WITH HONESTY

It is important to deal with incidents and accusations of unacceptable behaviour as they arise. Often, by having open and honest conversations with our staff, we can avoid unnecessary escalation. Sometimes, these situations will need formal action and that is when HR can help and the HR Business Partnering team can advise on what policies may need to be followed.

THEY MADE ME FEEL REALLY UNCOMFORTABLE IN THE TEAM MEETING BY COMMENTING ON MY DRESS BEING SO SHORT

IT'S SO ANNOYING DOING ALL THIS EDI TRAINING... POLITICAL CORRECTNESS GONE MAD.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY SWORE AT ME.

I'VE NOTICED THAT THEY KEEP GETTING SINGLED OUT FOR MORE OVERTIME.

WAS THAT JOKE TARGETED AT ME?

LEAD WITH COMPASSION

Get to know your team. Managers have the power and influence to shape working culture and can start to do so by showing empathy and simply listening to their staff to understand their perspective.

It is important not to make judgements or assumptions because this can often make difficult situations worse. If someone comes to you upset or angry about a comment or incident, or is worried about their own behaviour, do not dismiss them; instead, have confidence to 'see, hear, feel and act'.

PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

DO:

- Create a safe space for staff to speak to you in confidence.

- Recognise that if you are in a position of power, you have a responsibility to address offensive comments and create an inclusive work environment.

- Ask questions that encourage the person reflect on what has happened or been said and clear up any misunderstandings.

- Signpost to further support available and offer assurances that the staff member will not be negatively impacted by speaking up.

- Seek support yourself; if you are unsure about whether an issue needs to be escalated, check with your manager or HR.

DO NOT:

- Dismiss concerns or imply staff are overreacting or being too sensitive (we do not need to agree with our staff on every point, but we cannot dismiss their experience or interpretation of events).

- Assume that staff always know when they are being offensive; it is possible that they are unaware of the impact of their behaviour.

- Accuse someone of being a bully or racist/sexist – these are serious accusations and should not be made as a throwaway comment.

All of us are responsible for creating a positive working culture at the university but as managers, we have the power to change how things work for the better.

HELPFUL ARTICLES

The following articles provide useful information explaining why addressing unacceptable and negative behaviour is so important for organisations and especially, for leaders.

[Why Every Leader Needs to Worry About Toxic Culture (mit.edu)](#)

[Speaking truth to power: why leaders cannot hear what they need to hear](#)

[The Benefits of Creating A Speak-Up Culture At Work (forbes.com)](#)

[Empathy Is The Most Important Leadership Skill According To Research (forbes.com)](#)