

First Thursday Safety Topic

June 2019



This Will Hurt You More Than it Will Hurt Me...

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear a hundred battles. - Sun Tzu

This month I hope you will welcome one of the Associates at the Safety Institute, Gary Sheely. This month Gary will explore how you can deal with the drama of conflict by de-escalating the situation through his tactical process he teaches in his workshop. Let's hear from Gary...



We've all had the experience of finding ourselves face-to-face with a profoundly angry person, who is blaming us for their problem. They may be red-faced, raising their voice, ranting, cursing, even threatening us. How do you respond to them in the most effective way? What follows is an acronym, based on the word

LEARNS, to help you craft a tactical response to an angry person.

Listen to them

When you are being confronted by an angry person, it is almost a certainty that their verbal aggression will include accusations and insults in a raised voice or possibly even shouting. In that moment, your instinctive reaction is going to be to interrupt the angry person to defend yourself. No matter how accurate or justified you may be, this will escalate the anger in the confrontation.

The quickest path to de-escalation requires that you begin by listening while the angry person vents. For now, at least, you don't interrupt them. Don't correct them, contradict them or challenge their facts. You listen.

Display body language that indicates you are listening: turn your ear to them and nod occasionally to indicate you are following them. Do not cross your arms, lean away or scowl.

Empathize with their anger

Expressing empathy to an angry person is not what they are expecting. If they have come at you with a verbal attack, they are *expecting* you to resist, to push back, to return force with force. Expressing empathy when they are expecting aggression will always put them a bit out of balance, at least

for a moment. Instead of countering their momentum, you are sidestepping and redirecting it.

Defining empathy

Empathy only means that you understand the feelings they are having about it. It establishes a psychological connection with the angry person that cannot be achieved any other way. Angry people can only be engaged at an emotional level. You cannot jump into dialogue about facts until you first recognize the feelings.

Ask for more information

"Whose fault do you think this is?" "Why do you think they did that?" "When did you first know about this?" "What do you think I meant by that?" This should not be done in "interrogation mode," but as simply seeking more information about the incident that triggered the anger.

There are several distinct advantages to asking for more information. Among them:

Seeking more information further generates empathy. It demonstrates that you are genuinely interested in the angry person's problem.

The angry person will often become more rational in order to answer your questions.

Restate what the person has told you

If you have listened, expressed empathy and gathered sufficient information from your questions, this next move is extremely powerful if executed properly. This often creates a turning point in the confrontation. It is with this technique that you can actually interrupt an angry person, and they will allow you to do so. It is most effective if accompanied by an understated gesture. Hold up your hand, keeping it close to your body, palm toward the angry person, and say, "Let me see if I understand what you have said so far..." Then, in your own words, repeat back to them what they have said. Here's why this is such an effective tactic with the right timing:

It creates more empathy. This is a convincing proof to the angry person that you are truly trying to understand them. It gives you a chance to talk. It allows you to interrupt their rant, if that's what they had been engaged in. You are now more in control of the confrontation, and it's with the angry person's permission.

This gives you the right to ask them if they have understood you. This, then, becomes the beginning of dialogue.

To view a Gary's video on this month's topic, go to:

<https://vimeo.com/340569946>

Narrate from the beginning

Depending on the issue, the person’s temperament and the intensity of the anger, you may be required to cycle through these tactics multiple times in no particular order. As the person calms down and is ready to be constructive toward the problem that triggered their anger, these last two tactics, Narrating from the Beginning and Suggesting Solutions, then become appropriate and effective.

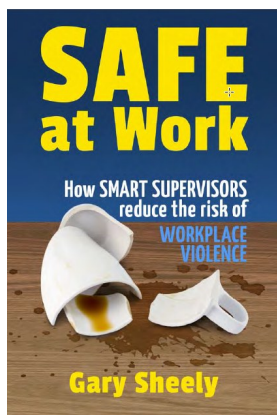
Narrating from the beginning is simply a comprehensive analysis and paraphrase of the overall problem, and functions as a transition into the final phase.

Good opening phrases for this part of the de-escalation might be, “So I guess this whole thing started because...” “Ok, so here’s how I understand what has happened...”

Along the way you are seeking agreement from the other person as the narration progresses. “OK, here’s what I understand happened...” “Did I get that right?” “Would you say that’s true?” “Is that how you see things, too?” After a series of “yes’s” in this phase you will be ready to work toward a collaborative resolution.

Suggest a solution

Now you can start solving the actual problem. The principle is simple: when a person is angry, you cannot objectively deal with facts until you have acknowledged the feelings. Once you have done that and can sense a desire to cooperate, it’s time to deal with the actual problem or precipitating event. This does not mean that you are imposing a solution; you are suggesting one, with the goal of maintaining a sense of cooperation with the other person.



Thanks Gary...
Every time we must confront a difficult situation we tend to expect drama. Safety at work, in the public, and sometimes at home can mean we are going to experience conflict. Be sure to watch the video where Gary will expand on this topic and share a dramatic story of how he avoided a punch in the nose.

Watch the 8 min video through

this link: <https://vimeo.com/340569946>

Get Gary’s book at safetybooks.com
Request booking information for his workshop by calling Nona Prather at: 800.259.6209

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What’s the Hazard?