

SESSION 4

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: ONE-ON-ONE WITH MEMBERS

OVERVIEW

In this session we work on communication. The better our communication skills, the more comfortable we will feel using any supervisory style. (Much of what we discuss and practice in this session in a context of working one-on-one with members is also relevant to working with teams and groups -- the subject of tomorrow morning's session.) During the first half of the afternoon, we will use two rounds of role plays to practice communication skills. Round One will focus on supportive communication behaviors such as active listening; Round Two will emphasize directive behaviors such as persuading and making proposals.

In the real world, supporting and directing communication behaviors are mixed together. Knowing how to balance supportive and directive techniques is critical to being a successful supervisor. Performance feedback is a good example. One of the most important functions a supervisor performs is to monitor the work members are doing, affirm good performance, and correct problems that may interfere with accomplishing tasks. In the second half of the session, we will present a model for giving performance feedback and use the model to practice (with a colleague) a performance feedback situation that is real for you back home.

The session will close by providing a chance to reflect on how the training process is going for you.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, you will be able to:

- ▶ Identify and practice supportive and directive techniques for helping members develop and get things done.
- ▶ Use a model to clarify preparation for and delivery of performance feedback to members.

VENUE Home Groups

Supervisory Communication Behaviors

It has been said that management or supervision is a performing art. It is not what you think or intend, but what you do and say that is important. Whether it is using situational supervision techniques, providing performance feedback, engaging in problem-solving discussions, or managing conflict situations, you have several basic categories of communication or influence behaviors at your disposal. How you select and use these behaviors will determine how effective you will be (in terms of achieving your desired result) as a supervisor, colleague or team member.

There are different ways to categorize communication behaviors; for purposes of this workshop, we offer the following three basic categories, along with some illustrative examples.

Directive (Assertive/Persuading) Behavior includes:

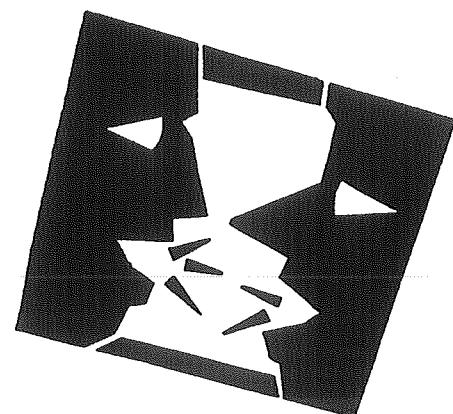
- Proposing: ideas, suggestions, recommendations, or asking questions that suggest a proposal
- Persuading: the use of reasoning, logic, and marshalling experience and facts to influence others
- Stating expectations: needs, demands, standards or prescriptions
- Evaluating: positive or negative judgements, personal and intuitive assessments
- Using incentives and pressure: specifying the ways and means you control what the other wants or needs (sometimes as the "boss," these need not be explicit. Note, however, that incentives are not always tied to your positional authority. Sometimes, withholding a desired relationship can be a powerful incentive to influence other people).

Supportive (Cooperative or Bridging) Behavior includes:

- Involving: soliciting views, ideas, and information from others and encouraging participation
 - Listening: paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting feelings, giving one's interpretation of other's position
- NOTE: "Listening" is not waiting your turn to talk; it is "seeking to understand before being understood."
- Disclosing: admitting mistakes, revealing uncertainty, making oneself vulnerable, asking for help.
 - Finding Common Ground: highlighting common values, beliefs, ideas or needs.
 - Visioning: using positive metaphors or word pictures (using attracting, emotional language) to convey a desired outcome.

Disengaging (Avoiding) Behavior includes:

- Postponing to a future time, focusing on process or methods, changing the subject or taking a break
- Backing down, dismissing differences, discarding own objectives, or withdrawing from the situation
- Using humor, war stories or digression to lighten the mood or deflect immediate engagement of an issue or personalities.
- While disengaging can seem like a non-behavior or avoidance, it can be useful to postpone a conversation to a more appropriate time or place (e.g., to give you or the other person a chance to "regroup" or prepare for a useful discussion rather than a confrontation).

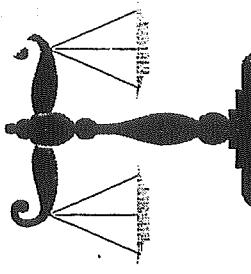


Criteria for Effective Feedback

- ✿ Feedback should be descriptive rather than evaluative.
- ✿ It should focus on feelings generated in you.
- ✿ Feedback should be specific rather than general.
- ✿ It is best received when it deals with behaviors the person can do something about.
- ✿ It is best received when asked for.
- ✿ Timing is important.
- ✿ Feedback is best heard as soon after the event as possible.
- ✿ It should never be "dumped" on a person.
- ✿ Feedback is best heard in a quiet, private setting.
- ✿ Feedback is best received when:
 - mutual trust exists between both people
 - both people are "in it together" to deal with problems and/or issues
 - careful listening occurs

Performance Feedback

Balancing Risks and Rewards



Known to the Recipient	Not Known to the Recipient
<p>Quadrant 1 feedback: is likely to be understood and used by the receiver, is low risk, and builds the credibility of the giver.</p>	<p>Quadrant 2 feedback: provides incentive for the receiver to use untapped skills and abilities and is low risk for the giver.</p>
<p>Quadrant 3 feedback: is likely to be believed by the receiver, but poses a higher risk for the giver.</p>	<p>Quadrant 4 feedback: is risky for the giver and may cause denial by the receiver. Don't start here! Build credibility with other types of feedback first.</p>
Positive/Affirming	Negative/Correcting

DESC

The Script Model

The **DESC** Script, developed by Bower and Bower in *Asserting Yourself* (1976), is a feedback method for constructively bringing an issue to a member's attention and initiating the problem-solving process.

An important aspect of the DESC script is that it focuses on the member's *behavior* and not the member generally. It allows the supervisor to depersonalize the discussion, to separate the member from the problem, and engage the member as an equal partner in finding a solution – essentially, it aligns the member and the supervisor as allies in finding resolution. To begin this process, the supervisor writes or carefully thinks through four steps in planning how to approach the member. The supervisor:

- Describes what the member is doing that creates problems;
- Expresses why that behavior is a problem for the supervisor or for the project;
- Specifies what s/he wants the member to do instead; and outlines positive and negative...
- Consequences for either succeeding or failing to change the problem behavior.

By writing out or thinking out what you want to say to a member, you are likely to be clearer, more forceful, and less judgmental in describing the problem in question. Writing out the script doesn't mean you sit down with the member in question and read it to him or her. It does mean you have thought through the presentation of the issues carefully before meeting with the member.

The following paragraphs describe each of the four steps of the script in greater detail:

Describe

A good description covers the facts about the issue, not the supervisor's assumptions about what these facts mean. Supervisors in general tend to assume what someone's intentions will be and jump into feedback discussions which sound blameful or judgmental. By writing out a description of what the person is doing, the supervisor can review the language for things like "loaded" words that may trigger anger in one or both parties -- and the discussion becomes a much more positive one. The description should also be specific so the member can clearly understand what behavior is at issue.

Express

Expressing the impact or consequences of the member's behavior is critical because it relates directly to motivation: members will be more motivated to explore ways to change when they understand other people's perceptions of their actions. The most important reason a behavior becomes a problem is when it interferes with the person getting her/his work done. Other reasons for involving a member in a discussion of a behavior are: a) the behavior keeps others from getting their work done; b) the behavior breaks the rules/policy/law; c) it creates interpersonal problems among the work group; d) it damages the status or credibility of members within the organization; or e) it creates a negative image of the project/organization.

Too often, supervisors assume that the causes of problems are obvious to the member in question, when in reality, supervisors usually have broader information and perspective about the project's needs than the member does. Another thing supervisors may assume is that they share the same values with members about work and how it ought to be done. In expressing the problem, the supervisor opens up the opportunity for learning more about the member's perceptions and motivations. Besides expressing negative effects of a behavior, it is helpful to point out the positive goals that are being interfered with or delayed by the problem behavior.

Specify

Specifying means deciding with the member exactly what steps you will take to address the situation at hand; it also means that you (the supervisor) decide what you, yourself, want to stop doing, start doing, or continue doing relative to the behavior. Sometimes it's simply easier for a supervisor to identify changes in his or her own behavior to preempt a problem than to hope for the member to change. When specifying the outcome wanted from the feedback, the supervisor should allow and *actively encourage* the member to suggest the means to achieving the end result. (The more motivated the member is, the less the supervisor should have to define the means to the end.) During the specifying step, it's helpful to explain what the desired goal is but also to state the bottom line so the member is clear on just how far the supervisor is willing to compromise.

Clarify Consequences

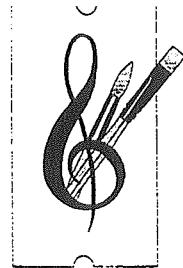
Identifying consequences can really motivate people to change, and *it's good to start with the positive ones*. In situations where it's the first time feedback on a particular issue is being given, it may not be necessary to state consequences. In general, though, by explaining the advantages a change in behavior will have, the supervisor essentially answers the member's unspoken question, "What's in it for me?" If, over time, the behavior does not change, or if the problem is a very serious one, then it's appropriate to state the negative consequences that will occur as a result. It's very important that the supervisor does not state a consequence that he or she would not be willing to carry out. Idle threats do not motivate the member, and they damage the supervisor's credibility. When discussing negative consequences, the supervisor should strive for a calm and matter-of-fact manner.

Delivering the Feedback

By writing out or thinking out the four steps above, the supervisor clarifies the issues and has a chance to carefully consider how s/he wants to phrase certain points. How the supervisor delivers the message also influences the member's reactions and willingness to be involved productively as a partner in finding a solution. *Keep in mind that it's important to describe, express, and specify (steps 1-3), before soliciting a response from the member – for three reasons. First, you will be better able to skillfully guide the discussion and keep it on track. Second, you will be able to explain the issue clearly and fully so that the member has enough information to become involved. And finally, you prepare yourself to become a better listener. Until you've fully expressed yourself, it may be hard to really listen to what the member has to contribute. Since the goal of feedback is establishing a two-way street, be sure all your own roadblocks to listening are down by stating your important points early and fully.*

Journal Reflection

Artistic Image

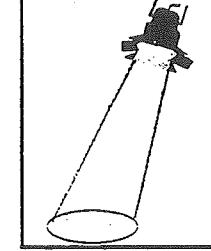


Session 4 - Communication Skills

Using symbols from nature -- either literal or imaginary -- create a symbolic illustration of what communication means to you. You can use plants, animals, bodies of water, the elements ... whatever you come up with!

Journal Reflection

Structured Reflection Questions



Session 4 - Communication Skills

- 1** During this session, I learned or got further clarification on the following things about communication which I thought I already knew:

- 2** During this session, I learned the following things for the first time:

- 3** From this session, the following questions, thoughts, or concerns remain:

- 4** What resources here, at my program, or elsewhere do I have to get the answers?

- 5** Three important communication skills I will commit to using at my program are:

Journal Reflection

Hmmmmm.....Reflection Sheet



Session 4 - Communication Skills

★ When I think of communication, I think of...

★ In communication, I value...

★ Therefore, in my communications within my AmeriCorps program, I will...

CHAPTER SEVEN

Giving Assertive Criticism and Solving Problems

In this chapter, you will:

- Learn the purpose of assertive criticism and the reasons why assertive criticism is such an important aspect of the supervisory role;
- Learn the steps in problem solving;
- Learn some of the feelings and beliefs that make giving assertive criticism difficult;
- Learn about the DESC Script for giving assertive criticism;*
- Learn to deliver criticism effectively;
- Learn to continue the problem-solving process after delivering criticism;
- See an example of the process in practice.

One of the most important functions that a supervisor performs is to monitor the work that is being done and to correct problems that are interfering with quality work. To do this, the supervisor must be able to give assertive criticism.

The Purpose of Giving Assertive Criticism

Assertive criticism's purpose is to confront problems in a way that elicits the employee's cooperation in the problem-solving process. As has been shown in Chapter Two, nonassertive supervisors do not

*The DESC scripting method was first developed by Bower and Bower in *Asserting Yourself* © by Addison-Wesley, 1976.

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confront problems in a way that leads to cooperative problem solving. They will often avoid confrontation and allow problems to become quite serious before they intervene at all. When they do intervene, they are inclined to be very apologetic and to describe their concerns in general, indirect ways. They may also save up grievances and explode inappropriately, confusing employees with this sudden change in style. Their voice characteristics and body language are hesitant, pleading, or questioning and they use minimizing words like "This is a little bit of a problem." With a highly motivated group of employees, this low-key approach might be quite sufficient to correct the relatively infrequent problems that will occur. However, given the normal range of employees, the supervisor will find that some employees need more assertive correction and control (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). For these employees, the nonassertive approach would be a case of "too little and too late." The nonassertive word choices, voice characteristics, and body language fail to convey to them the importance of the issues and therefore may not motivate these employees to put forth serious efforts to change.

The aggressive supervisor, on the other hand, doesn't hesitate to point out problems and to demand that employees correct the problems. As shown in Chapter Three, the aggressive style is one of accusation and blame. Criticisms are personal and threatening. Requests for change are stated as demands. Voice characteristics and body language are attacking and demanding and often send a "you dummy" message. The language used to describe problems is loaded and may involve name calling or judgmental labeling of the person. Unfortunately, while this approach may intimidate an employee into quickly correcting a problem, it creates defensiveness and resistance rather than involvement and teamwork. When people feel attacked or feel as if they are being forced to comply with demands, they may cooperate on the surface, but their underlying resentment saps energy and could lead to passive-resistant heel dragging. Also, people listen less effectively when they are on the defensive. The employee who is subject to aggressive criticism literally stops listening. Instead of examining the issues to see what can be done to solve the problem, he directs his energy primarily toward protecting himself. Thus pointing out to an employee how a problem is his fault may interfere with, rather than enhance, the problem-solving process. Although aggressive criticism often does

solve the immediate problem, it does not contribute toward developing a work climate in which the supervisor and the employee work together to solve problems and to get the work done. Neither does it lead to the kind of open discussion that allows the supervisor to uncover the causes of the problem so that further problems can be prevented.

Assertive criticism is the first step in the problem-solving process. The assertive supervisor uses criticism as a way to open up communication with an employee. The purpose of this communication is to uncover the causes of the problem and to remove these blocks to effective performance. The assertive supervisor approaches an employee's failure to perform as an opportunity to help that employee to do a better job. He assumes that most people don't intend to be ineffective, understands that people need to save face, and recognizes that fixing blame stimulates defensiveness rather than an effort to search for solutions to the problem. In this approach, even if the employee never admits that he is wrong, the criticism is considered effective as long as the problem behavior changes.

Jenine had been involved for several months in a power struggle with one of the receptionists she supervised. No matter how hard she tried, Jenine could never get this woman to admit that she was doing an inadequate job. Finally, she decided to simply describe to the employee how her frequent trips away from her desk were creating a problem in the office and specify how she wanted the behavior to change. She also granted that the employee was clearly trying to do what she felt to be a "good job." Once the employee did not have to admit that she was incompetent, she was willing to alter some of her behaviors.

Assertive criticism focuses on the situation (the behavior) and not on the person. It is objective rather than judgmental. The specific behaviors that are creating problems, the reasons why these behaviors create problems, the behavior that the critic expects to replace the problem behavior, and the consequences for the employee if the problem behavior continues are all clearly and objectively described. Voice characteristics and body language are neutral, strong, and direct. The words used to describe the problem are carefully chosen so as not to put the other person on the defensive. Once the problem has been explained to the employee, the

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supervisor listens and asks questions to help uncover the causes of the problem and to help the employee to generate solutions to the problem. Together the supervisor and employee discuss the problem until they are able to develop a plan of action to solve the problem. The supervisor then asks the employee to commit himself to carrying out a specific plan to solve the problem and follows up to see if the plan is working. To summarize, the steps in assertive problem solving are:

1. Call the employee's attention to the problem with assertive criticism.
2. Discuss the causes of the problem with the employee and elicit his perspective on the problem.
3. Develop a plan of action to solve the problem.
4. Get a commitment from the employee to the plan.
5. Follow up to see that the plan is working.

This chapter will deal in detail with how to call an employee's attention to a problem through assertive criticism. In particular, it will describe an assertive technique called the DEESC Script. The DEESC Script, which advocates giving criticism through describing problem behaviors, expressing why they are problems, specifying expected behaviors, and outlining consequences, was developed by Bower and Bower in *Asserting Yourself* (1976). The script is the first step in problem solving, which is covered in this chapter.

Which way of giving criticism (nonassertive, aggressive, or assertive) do you use most often?

How satisfied are you with your way of delivering criticism? What do you think needs to be changed?

Feelings and Beliefs that Create Problems in Giving Assertive Criticism

Giving good criticism seems to be one of the most difficult assertive skills to learn. One reason is that very few people are given a good model for dealing effectively with problems in their families. In some families, all conflict is ignored or denied. The message in this family is "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Attempts to express anger or let others know when something is upsetting are met with a very clear message that conflict and disagreement are unacceptable. In other families, the norm is to

express criticism but never to do it directly. In this kind of family, Mother may have complained to everyone about Aunt Helen but then been very nice to her in person. The message given is that criticizing someone directly will be devastating or catastrophic; however, there is at least a recognition that conflict and disagreement are a part of human relationships. In other families, any problems cause explosive fights characterized by verbal or even physical attack. Very few families demonstrate a way to solve problems through rational discussion. Thus, from the very beginning most people are hampered in their ability to solve problems through direct, open dialogue.

In addition, problems and conflict stir up many powerful emotions. When someone has been doing something that creates problems, you may feel angry and frustrated. Old feelings of guilt at expressing disagreement or criticism may crop up. Old fears that expressing criticism will result in some catastrophe and doubts that you are being fair and are justified in being critical may interfere with effective criticism. You may worry that being critical will be seen as mean or uncaring. You may have such a need to be perfect that you cannot imagine anyone being able to accept criticism without being totally devastated. Giving good criticism requires that you be able to be objective, calm, and confident of your right to confront problems directly. Sometimes it may be necessary to use the techniques described in Chapter Five to be able to deal with feelings that interfere with giving assertive criticism.

How were conflicts and problems handled in your family? What kind of messages did you get about being direct in expressing your feelings about a problem?

Think of a situation in which you either avoided criticism when you needed to be critical or criticized in a very aggressive way. What was the situation you needed to confront? What did you do? What do you wish you had done? What feelings and beliefs interfered with your assertiveness? How could you have disputed these feelings?

The DEESC Script

The DEESC script-writing technique, developed by Bower and Bower in *Asserting Yourself* (1976), is a clear, concise way to bring

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A problem to an employee's attention and to initiate the problem-solving process. It is called a DEESC Script because in order to be effectively assertive, a supervisor must be able to *describe* (D) what the employee is doing that creates problems; *express* (E) why that behavior is a problem for the supervisor or for the organization; *specify* (S) what she wants the employee to be doing instead; and outline positive or negative consequences (C) for either succeeding or failing to change the problem behavior: Writing out or thinking out what she wants to say to an employee enables the supervisor to be clear and forceful and also insures that the problem will be described in a nonjudgmental way. Calling this assertive technique a script does not mean that the supervisor writes out her confrontation and reads it to the employee. It does mean that she must have thought through the presentation of the problem carefully before she talks to the employee. Sometimes the supervisor writes out the script, practices it, and then delivers it without the written notes. With practice, the steps in the script can become a kind of mental checklist that a supervisor can use to decide quickly on a way to express her criticisms clearly. Here is how the Bowers' DEESC scripting method works.

Describe

The first step in making an employee aware of a problem is to describe what the employee is doing that is a problem. A good description expresses clearly and specifically what the other person is doing. It uses words, voice characteristics, and body language that are not likely to put the other person on the defensive.

A good description covers facts, not the supervisor's negative assumptions about what these facts mean. In other words, a good description is objective. As stated in Chapter Five, assumptions about another person's behavior are really guesses until they are checked out. There seems to be a common tendency to make the worst possible assumptions about someone's intentions or the meaning of a person's behavior when that behavior is frustrating. Thus, assuming can lead to a judgmental, blaming description of the problem. Using assumptions in the description tends to create defensiveness and also moves the focus away from the behavior and onto arguments about what the behavior does or does not mean. For example, suppose an employee is consistently late for staff meetings. The supervisor assumes that he is late because he is not committed to the organization. If the supervisor starts her script with "You are not committed to the organization," she points

the conversation toward a discussion of whether or not the person is committed and away from changing the person's lateness to staff meetings. A script will be more likely to elicit a focus on the behavior to be changed if the supervisor can avoid introducing assumptions.

For finding out if assumptions about an employee's behavior are correct, calling the process, described in Chapter Six, can be used. Calling the process may still be followed by the express, specify, and consequences portions of the script when there is a need to change behavior as well as a need to understand the employee better.

Sung-Lin was a supervisor in a matrix system that depended very heavily on communication between employees at all levels. One of her employees refused to communicate with the relevant personnel despite several conversations about the issue. She wanted to change the employee's behavior but she also wanted to find out how the employee felt about the job. She checked out her assumptions by saying "I've noticed that you haven't been telling Mark and Hannah when you finish coding and that you seem frustrated. I'm wondering how you are feeling about your job right now." When she had fully explored the employee's attitudes and had discovered that the employee really did not like the job, she was then able to deliver a script asking the employee to change the behavior despite the attitudes. She could also provide support in helping the employee to seek a more satisfying job.

It may be helpful to review the section on anger that deals with assumptions in Chapter Five before trying to describe the problem. This can aid in separating the facts from the assumptions so that your description can be objective.

A good description is not judgmental. One way judgmentalness is expressed is in the kinds of words that are chosen to describe the problem. If the description uses loaded language (described in Chapter Three), the employee is likely to begin planning her defensive retort and thus not even hear the rest of the script. Voice characteristics and body language also have significant influence on how a script is received.

The description should also be specific. There are two reasons for this. First, it is very hard for employees to change their behavior unless they know specifically what they are doing that creates problems. This is particularly true if the supervisor has identified a problem in behavior that the employee doesn't see as a problem.

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Jane had been told in her 6-month evaluation that she wasn't able to sort priorities very well. She spent weeks trying to figure out which aspect of her nursing behavior was unsatisfactory. Was she spending too much time talking to patients, too much time working on nursing notes, not enough time talking to patients, not enough time on nursing notes, or not enough time on cleaning up the unit? In other words, she knew that her supervisor considered her behavior defective in some way, and she wanted to correct the problem. She simply could not be sure what aspect of her nursing behavior was the "real" problem.

Second, presenting the problem in general terms invites the employee to change what she thinks is the problem, not necessarily what the supervisor thinks is the problem. Usually a supervisor has a specific complaint in mind when she describes a problem. For example, an employee might be doing one or more things that could lead a supervisor to call her inefficient. She might not be turning reports in; she might not be returning phone calls; she might be away from her desk too much. When the supervisor expresses the general complaint of inefficiency, the employee might start spending more time at her desk, thinking this will satisfy her supervisor. However, if she is mainly concerned about the employee's failure to turn in reports, the supervisor will continue to be frustrated. Further, when she confronts the employee again, the supervisor won't understand why the employee feels that her efforts to change have been ignored. Thus both employee and supervisor feel frustrated.

3. a. "You don't seem to really care about the productivity of this unit. You have been placing fewer clients than other counselors."
- b. "I'm concerned because you have been placing five fewer clients per month on the average than the other counselors."

ANSWERS

1. b is the better description because it avoids sounding like a judgment and is more specific.
2. b is the better description because it is more specific than a and, therefore, is more likely to communicate the supervisor's concerns more clearly.
3. b is the better description because unlike a it avoids introducing assumptions that could sidetrack the discussion. It concentrates on behavior.

Express

The second DESC step that the Bowers propose is *express*: in calling an employee's attention to a problem, let the employee know why what he is doing is a problem. Expressing this is critical because this is one of the most important motivational steps in the script. People are much more likely to be motivated to change something when they understand clearly why others see the behavior as a problem.

The director of training in one organization was extremely frustrated because one unit of the organization was not firming up a schedule for follow-up training. She would periodically call the manager of the unit and point out that the training had not been scheduled and ask for a decision to be made soon. Finally, she explained that she was holding up her whole training calendar to make sure that the follow-up could be scheduled. Once the manager knew why scheduling the follow-up now was important, he was quite willing to make a decision.

There are several reasons why a behavior might become a problem that needs to be confronted. The most important reason for confronting a behavior is interference with accomplishing the job. A supervisor needs to help employees understand how what they are doing might be interfering with their ability to get the work done. Also, specifying the effect that a particular behavior has on

SELF-TEST

Pick the better description of a problem from each of the following pairs of statements and specify what cues you used.

1. a. "You're supposed to be on top of all the samples in the lab, but at the rate you're going, you probably couldn't keep track of your own head if it weren't attached."
- b. "I checked the samples this morning and found that there are six samples that have been in the lab over 3 months."
2. a. "You don't communicate with me enough."
- b. "When you change a reporting procedure in the office without letting me know that you are making the change, you create problems for me."

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productivity forces the supervisor to separate personal preferences for a certain way of doing things from behaviors that clearly interfere with productivity. For example, a supervisor may strongly believe that it is more efficient to file materials once a week than to file every day. An employee may be doing excellent work and at the same time filing once a day. The supervisor can express his personal preference in this case, but he may not be able to make a good case for this personal style affecting output. On the other hand, if an employee's lateness means that he can handle significantly fewer clients per day, the supervisor can make a good case for how the behavior interferes with getting the job done. Employees also need to know that their behavior is a problem when it prevents others from getting their work done. For example, an employee might need to be reminded that stopping to chat with others on the way back from the Xerox machine interferes with others' productivity.

A second reason for confronting a behavior is if it is against the rules, is unethical, or is illegal. In some cases, employee behaviors violate the company rules without affecting productivity in any way that can be easily specified. For example, with some employees, it is hard to say how lateness interferes with getting the work done. In this case, the supervisor can simply state that the behavior is a problem because it violates company policy and failure to enforce company policy can establish a precedent that cannot be allowed. Another example is the frequent occurrence in human services agencies of breaches of confidentiality through discussions of cases in the halls. Counselors need to be reminded that such behavior is a problem because it is a breach of confidentiality and therefore unethical.

A third reason for confronting a behavior is that it creates interpersonal difficulties within the organization. For example, if a supervisor has to remind an employee several times to complete assignments, a working relationship is established in which the supervisor cannot trust the employee and then is always getting after the employee. Even if the employee produces the reports, a supervisor may want to help the employee understand that behaving in a way that creates this kind of personal relationship is not desirable. Behaviors may also need to be confronted because they create tension with co-workers or with higher management. Since employees may not really be aware of the interpersonal effects of their behavior, they may be motivated to change when they are told about the problem.

A fourth reason for confronting a behavior is that it is damaging that person's credibility or status in the organization. Since most people are highly motivated to protect their own interests, they will be more willing to solve problems that interfere with these interests. For example, an employee might need to be reminded that his failure to quickly return calls to important customers hurts his credibility and potentially damages his sales. The more a supervisor can focus on the self-interest of the person being confronted, the more likely it is that the person will be motivated to change. This is especially true when the person receiving the script is a manager rather than an employee. A careful expression of how changing a behavior is in the manager's self-interest may be the only way to motivate him to change. For example, a manager might need to know that his rewriting a supervisor's reports without consulting the supervisor means that the supervisor will never learn how to do the reports correctly, and therefore the manager will always have to make corrections.

A fifth reason for confronting a behavior is that it is creating a negative image of the organization or a unit within the organization. For example, an employee who complains about the organization in front of potential customers needs to know that his negative comments may hurt the organization and in the long run affect his job. In some cases, an employee's behavior may affect the image of other units of the organization. For example, the failure of the data processing branch to notify clients when refund checks are going to be late has negative repercussions for employees in other units, who then look as if they have not done their jobs.

All too often supervisors assume that the reasons why something is a problem are obvious and should not have to be pointed out. This is true only if those who are creating a problem have the same information and perspective as the supervisors do. A supervisor inevitably has a different picture of organizational needs than an employee because of different levels of involvement in management communication systems. Therefore, employees frequently don't have the background to see why doing something a particular way creates problems. Also, most people cannot see themselves as others see them and may not have considered the negative repercussions of their actions.

Most supervisors assume that any good employee shares their values about work and how it ought to be done. In the movie *What You Are Is What You Were When* (1976), Dr. Morris Massey points out important differences in values placed upon work in different

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generations. For example, for those people now in their fifties and sixties who experienced the Depression, job security is to be prized above everything else. Employees in their twenties consider security less important. Far more important are a sense of involvement in their work and good working conditions. In addition, some cultures place a stronger emphasis on the work ethic and on the relative positions of men and women in the work force. There are bound to be conflicts between supervisors and some of their employees just because differences in ethnic background, age, sex, and so on will produce inevitable differences in values. Thus, supervisors cannot assume that employees will always understand why their behavior is creating problems. The more different the employee is from the supervisor, the more necessary it will be for the supervisor to help the employee understand why a behavior is a problem.

After working for many years as a technical librarian, Gina found herself supervising a group of newly employed high school students in a public library. Initially she simply assumed that these students were not very motivated because she would describe a problem and find that they did not seem nearly as concerned about it as she felt they ought to be. After several months on the job, she realized that they really did not understand why something was a serious problem. For example, she realized that she needed to help them understand that filing books under the wrong call number might really prevent patrons from finding books they needed. She found that she had to carefully express the reasons for her concern in order to motivate these employees to change.

Traditional human relations training suggests that what should be expressed when confronting a problem is the confronter's feelings about the behavior. For example, one model (Gordon, 1977) suggests a framework of "I feel x because . . ." or "When you do x , I feel . . ." In intimate personal relations where caring about each other's feelings is the essence of the relationship, expressing feeling reactions to another person's behavior is probably not only appropriate but necessary. In supervisor-employee relationships, however, the employee may not care how the supervisor feels. In fact, with some "problem" employees, making the supervisor upset may be a payoff for the behavior. For this reason, the expression of why the behavior is a problem needs to focus on effects of the problem behavior on getting the work done, interpersonal relationships, and so on, not just on the supervisor's feelings. Thus, saying "You have

been a half hour late the last several mornings and that infuriates me" is likely to be less effective than "You have been a half hour late the last several mornings. When you are late, your customers are forced to call back to get information. I think that makes both you and the organization look bad." There are situations in which stating the supervisor's feelings about the behavior may be very useful. A supervisor may need to say to an employee "When you do x , I get very, very angry" when he needs to get the employee's attention. Some employees will not accept that they have overstepped a boundary until the supervisor is angry.

Another way to motivate an employee to change his behavior is to express not only the negative effects of a particular action but also the positive hopes or goals that are being interfered with by the problem behavior. This focus on creating a picture of how things could be if the behavior described in the initial part of the script did not exist can help the employee to see how change can help him: "I would like to have the kind of supervisory relationship where I can allow you the freedom to organize your own time. Not completing projects on time forces me to control your work more than I think either one of us likes."

SELF-TEST

Pick the better expression of why the behavior is a problem from each of the following pairs of statements and specify what cues you used.

1. a. "Your credibility in the organization is strongly influenced by the quality of your monthly reports. You will not be seen as a really competent worker unless the reports are good and in on time."
b. "When you don't get your paperwork done, it drives me crazy."
2. a. "I hate it when you override my decisions with my employees. It makes me feel ineffectual."
b. "When you override my decisions with my employees, I lose credibility and it creates a sense that you are the one to handle everything. That makes me less effective as a supervisor and creates more work for you."
3. a. "Not letting me know when you won't be in is really frustrating,"

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- b. "When I don't get the message that you won't be in, I can't make sure that someone covers for you and some of the students in your caseload don't get their needs met."
4. a. "I'd like to have a working relationship in which you and I can solve problems right away. When you let others know about problems but don't let me know, we don't get to solve the problems."
- b. "When you don't let me know about problems, we aren't able to put our heads together and come up with solutions."

ANSWERS

1. a is the better expression of why the behavior is a problem because it tells the employee how the behavior affects his status in the organization.
2. b is the better expression of why the behavior is a problem because it explains how the behavior affects working relationships in the organization and shows the listener how it would be to his advantage to change the behavior.
3. b is the better expression of why the behavior is a problem because it describes the effects of the action on the productivity of the unit.
4. a is the better expression of why the behavior is a problem because it describes more fully the positive hopes that the behavior interferes with.

Specify

The third DESC step in the criticism process is to let the employee know what behavior change is wanted. A confrontation with an employee will be ineffectual if the supervisor is clear about what is wrong and very vague about what she wants to have happen instead. This often happens because the supervisor has not decided what she wants to accomplish by confronting the employee. Unless the goal of the confrontation is clear, it will be very difficult to develop a concrete plan of action to solve the problem. In developing a script, the supervisor needs to decide what she wants the other person to stop doing, start doing, or keep doing. She also needs to decide what she herself wants to stop doing, start doing, and keep doing.

- A social work supervisor was very annoyed because a case worker would come to her four or five times a day for advice on cases he should have been able to handle himself. The supervisor decided that she wanted to quit spending 20 minutes discussing an issue she felt the employee could handle. She wanted the employee to try several strategies for solving the problem himself before bringing it in for discussion and to stop bringing in more than a few cases a week. However, she still wanted the employee to keep bringing in cases that he had tried to solve and couldn't.

It is helpful for the supervisor to explore changes she could make in her own behavior that might lead to solving the problem because people have more control over themselves than anyone else. Bringing about almost any change in an employee will require some change in the supervisor's way of responding to that employee. Sometimes the supervisor can change the situation quite radically simply by altering her behavior. For example, a supervisor may find herself trapped in extended conversations with an employee about personal problems when she asks a dejected-looking employee "What's wrong?" One way to alter the situation is not to initiate that type of conversation with the employee.

When specifying the outcome wanted from the confrontation, the supervisor should usually let the person being confronted suggest the means to achieve the outcome. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, people are more committed to plans they are involved in developing. Eliciting the employee's involvement in the process of developing a plan of action can increase the employee's willingness to follow through with the plan. It is also important not to be patronizing to employees. Outlining a specific plan for solving a problem may be experienced as a put-down. For example, saying to an employee "I would like to have letters typed accurately enough so that I don't have to return more than one or two a week for correction" is a specific description of the desired goal or outcome. Saying "In order to do this you should proofread every letter at least twice and then put the letters aside and proof-read them again" would be insulting to a secretary with experience. The more motivated the employee, the less the supervisor should be suggesting the means to an end and the more the details of the plan should come from the employee (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982.) However, with an employee who is either unwilling or unable

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to do the job, it may be necessary to specify not only the desired results but also the specific means to get to those results. (See Chapter Ten for more on this topic.)

Bart found that his employees were constantly annoyed by his specific requests for change. All of his employees had at least a master's degree, were highly motivated, and knew their jobs thoroughly. In an effort to be specific, he was leaving no room for their creativity and knowledge.

It is important to be specific and behavioral in the wording of the desired outcome. General terms, such as *try harder*, *be more considerate*, *be more efficient*, and *communicate more* leave too much space for the employee to interpret for herself what the supervisor expects. Not only does this increase chances of misunderstanding; it also makes it difficult to develop a specific plan for solving the problem.

It is also helpful for the supervisor to decide before confronting the employee not only the desired outcome but also what she would settle for (the bottom line). For example, suppose a supervisor has an employee who takes 3 months to develop an engineering plan that others can complete in 2 weeks. The ideal might be for the employee to do a report in 2 weeks, but the supervisor might settle for a month. Defining the bottom line ahead of time can help the supervisor know how much she is willing to compromise with the employee and can also help to define how far the supervisor is willing to carry the consequences if the behavior doesn't change. For example, would the supervisor be willing to fire the employee if the behavior does not change? What behavior change is the minimum acceptable change? There are many objectionable behaviors that are already above the bottom line, ones that the supervisor would prefer to change but could live with. One device for figuring out how much to invest in a given change is for the supervisor to ask herself "How important is this change to me on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the most important)? How invested is my employee in not changing on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the most invested)?" If the supervisor rates the behavior change at 5 and the employee also rates it at 5, there may be a very difficult nonnegotiable situation. If the supervisor rates the behavior at 1 and the employee rates it at 5, it may not be worth the supervisor's trouble to press for change. For the issues the supervisor rates at 5, she might use all levels of consequences.

Lee felt that all of his staff members should be able to analyze data using microcomputers. One staff member had very strong feelings against microcomputers (a rating of 5). When Lee evaluated his feelings, he recognized that although he preferred that each staff member learn to analyze data (a rating of 3), he would be willing to have some people who would simply carefully prepare data for analysis. This was his bottom line. Thus, Lee encouraged all staff members but this one to use the microcomputers. He recognized that to push this employee to use the computer would not be worth the trouble.

Think of one of your supervisory problems. What behaviors do you want yourself to stop doing, start doing, and keep doing in the situation? What behaviors do you want the other person to stop doing, start doing, and keep doing? What is your bottom line for behavior change in this situation?

SELF-TEST

Pick the better specification of desired behavior change from each of the following pairs of statements and specify what cues you used.

1. a. "I'd like you to try harder to do a good job on new accounts."
b. "I'd like new accounts to be contacted at least every 2 weeks for the first 3 months."
2. a. "I'd like you to be considerate when I am on the phone."
b. "I'd like you to wait to speak to me until I am off the phone."
3. a. "I would like to reduce the number of incident reports on the unit by 20 percent. How could we do this?"
b. "I want to reduce incident reports on your unit by 20 percent. I want you to check all medication orders personally, talk to each patient, and check all special orders."

ANSWERS

1. b is the better specification of desired behavior change because it is more specific and behavioral.
2. b is the better specification of desired behavior change because it is more specific and behavioral and it does not imply that the employee is inconsiderate as statement a does.

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3. *a* is the better specification of desired behavior change for an employee who is experienced and motivated and who would be insulted by overly explicit instructions. It is also more cooperative. *b* is the better specification of desired behavior change for an employee who is unmotivated to do the job.
-

Consequences

The fourth step of the criticism process suggested by Bower and Bower in the DIESC Script is to let the employee know the positive consequences for changing his behavior or the negative consequences for failing to change his behavior. Often during the first interaction with an employee consequences can be left out altogether; however, this stage of the interaction presents a powerful opportunity to motivate the employee to choose to change. Thus, stating the positive consequences that will happen for the employee if he changes his behavior is the best first approach. People are more likely to do something if they feel that it is in their self-interest to do so. In one sense, they are always asking "What's in it for me?" If the supervisor can describe how it is to the employee's advantage to change his behavior, the employee may be more willing to carry out the change. It sometimes requires creativity on the part of the supervisor to think of ways in which the change would be beneficial to the employee. Sometimes the major positive benefit for the employee is to get the supervisor off his back: "If you do this, I won't be bugging you all the time." Other positive consequences might be to reduce tension in the office, to make the employee look better at his annual review, or to help the employee be able to organize time better.

Chapter Three discussed muscle level in an interaction. At Muscle Level I, the supervisor politely requests what he wants. At Muscle Level II, he states his position with more forceful word choices, voice characteristics, and body language. At Muscle Level III, he states the negative consequences that will occur if the behavior continues. At Muscle Level IV, he carries out the consequences. The assertive supervisor starts with the lowest possible muscle level but is willing to apply more serious consequences if the behavior does not change. It is not aggressive to raise the muscle level with an employee, but it is aggressive to raise the muscle

- level too soon. With employees who are unmotivated, it is often necessary to apply Muscle Levels III and IV to motivate them to change. With more motivated employees, Muscle Levels I or II may be sufficient to bring about the desired changes, and higher muscle levels at an early stage of intervention would be counterproductive and threatening.

If the behavior does not change after several low-level interactions with the employee, or if the problem is very serious and cannot be allowed to occur again, it is appropriate to state clearly the negative consequences that will occur if the specified behavior continues. It is very important that the supervisor not state a consequence that he would not be willing to carry out. This is one reason that threats like "We don't want people who act like you around here" are generally ineffective motivators. If the supervisor states a consequence for continuing a behavior and the behavior continues without the supervisor's following through, he has lost much of his power for later interactions. This is one reason that it is important for a supervisor to decide how far he is willing to go to get a particular behavior to change.

Ellen, a head teller, supervised an employee who was often 5 to 10 minutes late. The employee did an outstanding job when she did arrive. Despite several confrontations, the employee's lateness had not improved significantly. Since the employee was otherwise competent, Ellen was clearly not willing to fire her for lateness. She was willing to make a written comment in the employee's annual review.

There is a whole range of potential negative consequences that a supervisor could apply to problem behavior. Generally, verbal reprimands have less power than written reprimands. Written reprimands that become a permanent part of the employee's records have more power than memos that can be destroyed. Letting the manager or others in the organization know about the problem is a higher power consequence than just discussing the problem with the employee on a one-to-one basis. Reprimands that will directly influence the employee's promotability or salary are higher power than reprimands that will have no concrete influence on his position in the company.

At this point it is important to be realistic. There are many situations in which supervisors only have access to relatively low-power consequences. For example, in some organizations, firing

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(the consequence with the most power) is simply not available. Even in companies where employees can be fired with cause, special circumstances may make it very unlikely that a particular employee could be demoted or fired: the employee may have many years of satisfactory service to the company, he may have political connections that protect his position, or the branch manager may be unwilling to take a stand where a court suit is a possibility.

This lack of firing or demotion as a consequence has three implications for supervisors. First, the supervisor must often struggle to develop consequences short of firing or demotion that will be sufficiently powerful to influence a particular employee. Asking "What would affect this employee's working life? Is it something I have control over?" can help to define these alternative consequences. One supervisor, in working with an employee with many years of satisfactory service who had stopped producing at work, started meeting with the employee every Monday morning. At this meeting the employee was to document his performance for the previous week. This intensive follow-up offered an opportunity to help the employee to improve his performance and also served as a negative consequence for continuing to perform poorly. Second, the supervisor must often assert himself with others in the organization to get the backing that makes it possible to apply serious consequences. What this means is that any decision to change an employee's performance rating or to apply any other very serious consequence should be discussed with and supported by management. Third, the supervisor should realize that documentation is the key to having access to high-power consequences. Union officials have made it clear that, even in organizations with a strong union, an employee who is carefully documented to be incompetent and given plenty of opportunity to improve can be fired.

Since the Bowers' DESSC Script is a clear and objective way to describe employee problems, it forms a strong base on which to build documentation of an employee's failure to improve. The more specific and well defined the problems and expectations are, the more likely that the supervisor will be able to demonstrate failure to solve problems.

Voice characteristics in delivering consequences can strongly influence the way the statements are received. If the tone of voice is threatening, the consequences statement may sound like a challenge or a dare. It is vital that the consequences be stated calmly

and matter-of-factly. It is sometimes helpful to state the consequences along with a statement that the employee has to make a choice. In other words, the consequences are presented as information that the employee needs to take into account in deciding whether to work to change his behavior. As said in Chapter One, when the supervisor implies he can make an employee do something, it tends to set up a power struggle. For example, saying "You'd better begin to proofread more accurately or you're going to lose your good rating" can be quite different in effect from saying "Not proofreading your work more accurately will lower your rating on your next review. You need to decide whether you want to keep your present rating."

With a very difficult employee you may need to use Muscle Levels III and IV several times. Each time the consequence that the employee must face should be a more serious one. This corresponds to the normal steps in disciplinary action that are included in many company personnel policies. For example, an employee might first have a note about his behavior entered into his personnel file. If the problem continues, it might result in a change in the employee's performance rating or in a meeting with the employee, the supervisor, and the manager. It is helpful when dealing with a difficult employee to consider the range of consequences that are available if the behavior does not improve. Since these consequences differ with each company, it is vital that the supervisor know the company's personnel policies thoroughly.

Eugene was working with a clerk who was often late, did sloppy paperwork, and was rude to customers. His first step was to clearly confront each problem with a script. In the first few confrontations he avoided negative consequences and expressed his hopes that the employee would become a fully productive member of the department. When no improvement occurred, Eugene warned the employee that failure to improve would be noted in her personnel file. When her performance still did not improve, Eugene met with the employee and the manager to discuss the problems and let the employee know that failure to improve would influence her rating. At the same time that he confronted her, Eugene looked for and acknowledged positive performance. After several months, there was gradual improvement in the employee's behavior.

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SELF-TEST

Pick the better statement of consequences from each of the following pairs of statements and specify what cues you used.

1. a. "If you cannot decrease your absenteeism, I will have to decrease your rating from a very good to satisfactory. You need to decide if you want to keep your present rating."

- b. "You had better come to work more regularly if you don't want to get into a lot of trouble."
2. a. "If you don't stop interrupting me when I'm on the phone, I'm going to scream."
- b. "If you cannot wait until I am off the phone before asking me questions, I will have to alter my open door policy and ask you to make an appointment before you come to see me."

3. a. "If you can make the next three meetings, I think we can lay the groundwork to complete the whole project by May. That would mean that you could move on to the bridge designing project that you are interested in."
- b. "If you can't get to the next three meetings, don't bother showing up here at all."

ANSWERS

1. a is the better statement of consequences because it states consequences as a choice, is specific, and does not make threats as statement b does.
2. b is the better statement of consequences because it is specific and states more realistic consequences than statement a.
3. a is the better statement of consequences because it states positive consequences and does not make threats as statement b does.

2. "You have been spending time each day making and receiving phone calls having to do with your other business. I want you to stop it."
3. "You haven't been charting some of your patients lately before you leave. This means that the nurses on the next shift do not have detailed information about the patients' conditions to use to evaluate changes. This could clearly adversely influence patient care."

4. "You don't seem to be too interested in your work lately. The last several samples you have run have been reported with serious errors in the calculations. Since some of these results are used in determining potential hazards, this kind of error could result in a very serious problem. I would like you to check your calculations more carefully so that this kind of error does not recur."

ANSWERS

1. This script has a number of problems. First, it is very aggressive. "Incompetent" is a word that cannot be used in a nonloaded way. Second, it is very general. The person receiving the script still would not know exactly what needed to be corrected about his design work nor would he know what the person criticizing the work wants him to do instead.
2. This script is fairly specific and nonloaded about the description and specifies the behavior change desired but does not attempt to motivate the employee to change behavior. There is no expression of why the behavior is a problem at all.
3. This script has a clear description of behavior and an excellent expression of why the behavior is a problem but does not specify clearly what the script deliverer wants the employee to do about the problem. Although the desired behavior is obvious here, not stating it clearly and getting a commitment to do something about it could lead to a failure to change.

SELF-TEST

For each of the following examples, how effective is the script? If the script is not effective, what needs to be done to make it more effective? (These scripts intentionally do not include consequences because consequences vary among work settings.)

1. "Your design work lately has been incompetent. We need your kind of incompetence like three holes in the head."

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PRACTICE DESC SCRIPT

Now, choose a supervisory problem and write a good DESC Script.

D =

E =

S =

C = (Include four consequences of increasing seriousness.)

Evaluate the script by asking someone else to read the script and answer the following questions.

1. If I were the person receiving this script, would I be clear about what I am doing that's a problem, why it's a problem, and what my supervisor wants me to do about it?
2. Is the script written in a way that would be sure to put me on the defensive?

Delivery of Criticism

Writing out or thinking out the four steps in the DESC Script encourages supervisors to clarify their complaints and to carefully consider their choice of words. However, as outlined in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, the way in which the supervisor delivers the script to the employee also strongly influences the employee's reactions. Voice characteristics, body language, and the pacing of the script influence how the message is received. Since the purpose of the script is to communicate "We have a problem that we need to put our heads together to solve," it is vital that the script be delivered in an even, strong voice tone, with eye contact, and with a relaxed posture rather than in an overly meek or overly aggressive style. If the script is delivered in a wishy-washy, questioning

tone of voice with no eye contact, the receiver can ignore the importance of the message. If the script is delivered in an attacking tone with a pointed finger, the receiver is just as likely to be on the defensive as if the script were worded in loaded language. Chapter Nine of *Asserting Yourself* by Bower and Bower provides some exercises that are useful for delivering a DESC Script assertively.

If you are too angry to be objective when delivering criticism, do something to discharge some of the anger first. Someone who is enraged is not likely to deliver a script in a neutral, objective tone of voice. You may need to write a nasty memo and tear it up, blow off steam to someone else, or release enough of the angry feelings in some other way to be able to deliver the script relatively calmly.

Clayton had been avoiding delivering a script to Tom about talking to his girlfriend on the only phone in the office on company time. One day when Tom made his usual 10:00 call to his girlfriend, Clayton could no longer contain his rage. He shouted at Tom to hang up immediately and told him he was forbidden to use the phone again for any personal calls. Tom was very resentful and defensive about the way Clayton had confronted him, and although he stopped making calls to his girlfriend, his working relationship with Clayton became very hostile.

When delivering a script, describe the problem behavior, express why it is a problem, and specify the desired behavior before allowing the employee to interrupt. There are several reasons for this. First, you need to maintain control of the interaction. If the employee reacts before you are finished, you have lost control. Second, until you finish, the employee really doesn't know what she is going to be asked to do. The employee's reactions before you specify the behavior may be out of proportion. For example, an employee being confronted about a need to complete one project before starting another may imagine that she will be asked to do all projects in less than a week. Knowing that all that she is being asked to do is to finish may be quite acceptable. Third, once you have delivered the script, your job is to listen to what the employee has to say in response. If you are just listening for an opening to finish the confrontation, you are unlikely to be really listening to the employee.

Of course, it may be difficult to stop some employees from interrupting you. Finishing the script with a very defensive employee may require three things. First, don't pause or give the employee

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any opportunities to sidetrack the conversation. Second, if necessary, use the broken-record technique, described in Chapter Six, to get back on track. It is important to remember that the DESC Script should not be a monologue but a frame for a conversation. However, it may be necessary to use the broken-record technique or assertive replies, as covered in Chapter Eight of Bower and Bower's *Asserting Yourself*, to get the employee back on track. For example, if an employee said, "What about Mary? She never answers the phone on the first three rings," her supervisor might say, "That may be, but right now I want to talk about what's happening with you." She might also say, "I want to hear your reaction but let me finish first." With a very aggressive employee it might be necessary to repeat the broken-record statement several times in order to finish describing, expressing, and specifying. Third, make these sections of the script short. Overly long scripts are not good with any employee, but they are especially prone to failure with very aggressive employees because such employees will not sit still for a long confrontation.

An initial negative reaction to a script does not mean that the criticism will not work in changing the employee's behavior. As stated previously, most people have a need to save face. One way that some people have learned to save face is to sulk or bluster when they are criticized. Other people will almost always cry. As you learn each of your employee's common strategies for responding to criticism, it becomes possible to just let the blustering or the tears happen without taking those reactions personally. Supervisors who back off from confronting an employee because of a negative pattern of response to criticism may be inadvertently training the employee to be negative. For example, suppose every time a child had a temper tantrum in the grocery store, the mother gave the child a lollipop. What would happen to the incidence of temper tantrums in grocery stores? If every time an employee cries, sulks, or gets angry the supervisor backs off, what is likely to happen to the incidence of crying, sulking, and getting angry when criticized?

Whenever Lois confronted Kim about her rude behavior with other employees, Kim blustered, saying her co-workers didn't deserve better treatment, and then sulked for days. After the first confrontation, Lois felt it was hopeless to talk to Kim but decided to try again. When Kim's behavior did not improve in a week, Lois talked to her again and continued to confront her and explore the reasons for the behavior until Kim changed.

What to do with particular kinds of problem employees will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Ten. In brief, there are several assertive things that you can do when confronted with a strong negative reaction to a script. First, simply allow the employee to have the negative reaction and go on with the problem-solving process. Second, help the employee to express her distress in clear verbal terms by calling the process: "You are yelling at me. Can you tell me what upsets you so much about what I said?" Third, present the script, then back off for the moment with a commitment to discuss the problem again later. Fourth, if the employee's reaction to criticism is always so negative that it is impossible to do problem solving, you may need to deliver a "metascript"—a script about what happens when the person is criticized. In one instance, a supervisor had an employee who would simply get up and walk out of the room whenever the supervisor started to say anything the least bit critical. This supervisor needed to find a time when some other problem was not too pressing and call the employee in for a conference to deliver a metascript something like this:

- D "Whenever I try to talk to you about a problem, you walk out of the room and refuse to discuss the issue."
- E "I think that creates more problems because it leaves me feeling as if we have no way to solve anything. I feel that you could really work with me if we could just sit down and discuss some things."
- S "I would like you to at least stay and hear me out, and then if you think I'm being unfair, let me know."
- C "If you will do that, I think we can solve problems before they become real crises."

When you deliver a script and you sense that the other person did not hear or understand you, ask her to paraphrase or summarize the criticism before reacting. Clarifying communication problems in the beginning can prevent some long and futile arguments based on misunderstanding. For example, if an employee seems to be acting as if the supervisor said she was a completely incompetent employee when all the supervisor said was that she needed to rewrite the last paragraph of her report, it would be helpful for the supervisor to say either "I'm not saying you are incompetent, I'm just saying that you need to rewrite the last section" or "What did you hear me saying to you?"

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It is helpful to confront only one or a few issues at a time with a script. Since the script is a problem-solving process, script delivery needs to focus on a problem that can be solved by some specific plan of action. Outlining a long list of problems scatters the focus of the confrontation so that little real problem solving can go on. What about the employee with a long list of behavior problems? In this instance it may be helpful to say something like "I'm concerned about several problems relating to your work; however, right now I'd like to see if we can take a look at x and come up with a plan for solving that problem."

Helping an employee to understand that this particular problem is only one of a number of concerns is an example of providing a "frame" for the script. A frame helps the employee see how the behavior described in the script fits into the bigger picture of the employee's overall performance. An appropriate frame when dealing with a very sensitive employee who has a tendency to overreact to criticism could be a statement like "I am very pleased with your work in general. However, I am concerned about this one problem. I'd like to see if we can solve it and bring this part of your work up to the excellent standards you have set in the rest of your work."

Timing is very important when presenting a script. Choose the moment of confrontation carefully. For a script to have maximum impact, it must be delivered, whenever possible, at a time when the receiver can listen wholeheartedly. This means that delivering the script when an employee is just leaving for lunch or at the end of the day or the week may not be the most effective timing. Although it is often best to confront a problem immediately when it happens, there are some circumstances in which it would be better to wait to confront an employee. When an employee chronically does something that creates problems, the best time for confrontation might be when the behavior is *not* happening. When a problem is occurring, you are likely to be angrier and less in control and the employee is likely to be defensive (the "hand-in-the-cookie-jar" phenomenon). For example, suppose a supervisor has an employee who chronically interrupts meetings. Catching the employee between meetings, the supervisor might say, "I'm concerned because you often come in to talk to me when I'm in a meeting. At those times, I don't really listen to what you're saying, and I can't pay attention to the meeting either. Next time I want you to wait until after the meeting is over before you ask questions."

When the problem behavior is a long-term habit, do not assume that if the problem recurs the employee is unwilling to change.

People are often unaware of habit behaviors. When she is confronted about a habit, the employee will pay attention and bring the behavior into awareness. While she pays attention, the behavior is controlled. When she stops paying attention, the old behavior will start to return. This is why a confrontation will sometimes lead to 2 or 3 weeks of change followed by a recurrence of the same problem. Long-term habits or deeply ingrained styles of acting require many confrontations before lasting change occurs. Lateness is a prime example of this kind of problem. People who are naturally prompt find it very difficult to understand why anyone would be late. People who are chronically late are usually late not only to work but to many other activities in their lives. They often are also very poor at estimating how long any task will take. These habitual ways of dealing with time are pervasive and difficult to change. That does not mean that a supervisor should not confront and attempt to change chronic lateness. It does mean that the supervisor needs to be braced for a relatively long struggle. It may take 6 months or a year for permanent change in habit to occur. Sometimes it isn't necessary to deliver a whole script to remind an employee to pay attention to a problem. In some cases, just an "oops, it's happening again" is enough to direct attention to the problem so that the employee can bring the behavior under control.

SELF-TEST

Say whether each of the following would be an effective delivery of a script and specify what cues you used.

1. Ralph confronted his manager about the new scheduling procedures the day before a hearing with the budget committee.
2. Martha had allowed herself to get very angry at one of her employees. She decided to talk over her anger with another supervisor and then sit down and develop a script when she had cooled down.
3. Arlene was very concerned about developing a dialogue with her employees. When she confronted them, she would describe the problem and then elicit a reaction from them.
4. Wanda was learning to confront one of her employees who responded to all criticism by sulking for several days. When she ignored the sulking, she found that the confrontation would work anyway.

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5. Louis had an employee with many problems. His strategy was to include these multiple problems in one script.
6. Jefferson found that with certain employees who were particularly sensitive to criticism, it was very helpful to let them know what they were doing right as well as letting them know the problem.
7. Bennett would get furious because one employee with an overly loud voice would quiet down for a week when Bennett confronted him, but would then start to talk loudly again.
8. Candice didn't explain her criticisms to employees even when they asked for clarification.
9. Ernie developed very clear and specific scripts but delivered them in a loud and demanding voice and often pointed his finger or slapped his hand on his desk while talking.

ANSWERS

1. Ineffective—A manager faced with a budget hearing will not be as available to listen as usual. Ralph needs to choose a better time to confront his manager.
2. Effective—Martha has recognized that she needs to get her anger under control so that she can effectively confront the problem.
3. Ineffective—Arlene may lose control by asking for reactions before she has completed the script. If she wants to uncover the causes of the problem rather than focusing on solving it, calling the process is more helpful.
4. Ineffective—Wanda is learning that even though the first reaction to a script is negative, it may still work.
5. Ineffective—Scripting too many issues at once loses the focus.
6. Ineffective—Letting the employee know how the problem fits in overall behavior is useful.
7. Ineffective—Bennett doesn't recognize that changing long-term habits requires many confrontations.
8. Ineffective—It is important to make sure the other person understands the criticism.
9. Ineffective—Ernie is using aggressive voice characteristics and body language that may make his listener defensive.

Problem Solving After Giving Criticism

- Giving criticism is the beginning of the problem-solving process, not the end. A great deal of time has been spent outlining ways to approach the employee about the problem because how the problem is initially broached has a lot to do with how the employee will participate in the problem-solving process. The script is a way to initiate a mutual problem-solving process. After presenting the script, you need to continue the problem-solving process by:
- Step 1. Discussing the causes of the problem with the employee and eliciting his perspective on the problem,
 - Step 2. Developing a plan of action to solve the problem,
 - Step 3. Getting a commitment from the employee to the plan,
 - Step 4. Following up to see that the plan is working.

Discuss the causes of the problem

and the employee's perspective on the problem. Since the script is not an attempt to fix blame, it ideally leads to some real exploration of the issues creating the problem. Before any solutions are developed, both the supervisor and the employee need to understand exactly what is going on. At this point, even if you feel that the employee is being defensive, it makes sense to listen to the employee carefully. It is often helpful to use the technique of active listening (Chapter Six) to open communication with the employee. Listening is one of the ways that an assertive intervention differs from an aggressive one. An employee confronted assertively may not feel happy about the confrontation, but he will feel heard. Mutual dialogue is a very important part of building involved teamwork.

Even if the employee's response is to argue that he doesn't see the behavior as a problem and that he thinks you are being totally unfair, it is far better for the employee to have an opportunity to express his disagreement verbally than to have it expressed later through passive aggressive resistance to carrying out the plan of action. If an employee were to say "I don't see how you can be upset about my working in the stockroom so much. You keep telling me that keeping the shelves clear is important. I think it's unfair that I should have to keep the stockroom clear and be at my desk," the supervisor might summarize and let the employee know he had been heard by saying "So, you feel at this point like I'm giving you contradictory instructions." Responding to the employee's

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views, even when they are negative, helps to create open dialogue and communicate respect for the employee.

The employee's reactions to the script will often uncover some causes for the problem that may need to be corrected before the problem can effectively be solved. In the situation just described, it is possible that the supervisor hadn't clarified to the employee that he should be at the desk unless another employee is available to take over for him. In another example, an employee was failing to get monthly reports in on time because he wasn't getting the data from another unit of the organization on time. He needed supervisory help to get the data. Once the supervisor really understood the employee's concerns, it was possible to devise a good plan to solve the problem. Sometimes the employee's protests provide you with information that will allow you to devise a better description, expression, and specification in your script. In the previous example, knowing that the employee feels a conflict between parts of his job, the supervisor might say, "The problem isn't that you work in the stockroom. The problem is that you leave the desk uncovered when you are working in the stockroom. That means that customers may leave before they find someone to wait on them. It sounds as if you and I need to talk about ways for you to do both parts of your job without a conflict."

Employees may just need an opportunity to run through their repertoire of excuses for not doing the job. Once the supervisor knows what the excuses are, he can then use a "given that" statement to move the discussion back to problem solving: "Given that you don't like Helen, what could you do so that your dislike of her does not interfere with your job performance?"

One of the problems that most supervisors encounter when an employee is resistant to confrontation is letting their own frustration and annoyance interfere with their ability to problem solve. In other words, they may be perfectly capable of calmly and assertively stating the problem through using a DESC Script, but when they start to listen to the employee they find that they disagree so strongly with what is being said that they react to the resistance instead of handling it. As stated previously, some employees will learn which kind of resistance causes the supervisor to have trouble remaining objective. They can then use this reaction to get control of the interaction, or at least to cause the supervisor to lose control. Handling resistance rather than reacting to it requires that you put aside your emotional reaction to the resistance, listen carefully

to the employee's point of view and let the employee know you understand, and then either restate the expression of why the behavior is a problem to make a stronger case or clarify the description of the problem behavior or the specification of the desired behavior. In this method of responding to resistance, you use the employee's perspective on the problem to strengthen your statement of the problem.

Develop a plan of action

This step of the problem-solving process requires asking the employee to develop a plan to solve the problem. As said earlier in the chapter, plans that employees develop themselves elicit more commitment than plans that come from the supervisor. Since the goal of the whole problem-solving process is to develop a plan that will be carried out, eliciting employee participation can be a vital part of problem solving. The more motivated the employee, the more important it is that you elicit some employee involvement at this point. This involvement of the employee in the planning helps to create an environment in which problem solving becomes the employee's, as well as the supervisor's, responsibility. For example, a supervisor might say, "I need you to find a way to balance your accounts more accurately at the end of the day. What would you need to do to accomplish this?" If the employee says he doesn't know, the supervisor has two alternatives. He can make suggestions ("You could do x. Would that work for you?") or he can say, "Since you are the one who will have to carry out the plan, it's important that you help to come up with a plan that will work. What are some possible ways you could see for overcoming the problem?" In this second instance, the supervisor simply refuses to take full responsibility for solving the problem. Giving suggestions as in the first instance is appropriate when the employee probably honestly does not know what to do about the problem. When the failure to participate in the problem-solving process represents an attempt to evade responsibility for solving the problem, the supervisor's assertive refusal to solve the problem for the employee may be an important part of the confrontation. Of course, it is very tempting at this point for the supervisor to say "You should do x, y, and z to solve the problem." Resisting the temptation to take over the responsibility and saying "Why don't you think about some possible ways to solve the problem and we'll get back together this afternoon" may be difficult.

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With a very motivated employee, it may not be necessary to discuss all of the specific elements of the plan of action. The end result of the process in this case may be a general agreement that the employee will solve the problem by a certain time. The less motivated the employee, the more necessary it is that the plan of action be very specific. With a very unmotivated employee the supervisor will need to supply many more of the specific details of the problem solution: "I need you to do *x*, *y*, and *z* by 3:00 this afternoon." The development of the plan of action then becomes a negotiation in which both the supervisor and the employee make suggestions, evaluate these suggestions, and then decide on the most feasible plan. In some cases, the supervisor's role may be to question unrealistic plans; for example, "John, I wonder if it's really realistic for you to plan to do six sets of notes a day when you have not been able to get any done this week." It is also the supervisor's responsibility to search for obstacles that might interfere with carrying out a particular plan, perhaps asking "John, can you think of anything that might interfere with carrying out this plan?" The goal is to have a workable plan that will be carried out. This may require that the supervisor step in and remove some obstacles: "So, John, you're saying that you can't work on the case notes when you are being interrupted so much by the phone. If I have your calls held for an hour every day, will you be able to get the notes done that day?"

A good plan of action should specify what the employee and the supervisor are going to do and when they are going to do it. If other people are to be involved in the solution of the problem, the plan needs to specify how they will be informed of their role: "So we will meet every Monday starting next Monday to go over the backlog of reports and see which ones will be priority for the week. I'll let Mary know and you can let Bob know about the meeting."

Get a commitment from the employee to the plan
Once you and the employee have discussed the problem and developed a mutual plan of action, you need to ask the employee to make a commitment to the plan: "Are you willing to do this?" If the employee says something like "I guess so" or "I'll try" or "Maybe," it may be important to ask again, "Does that mean that you are or are not willing to do this?"

The supervisor's and the employee's commitment to carry out particular behaviors within a given time constitute a kind of verbal contract. This clear specification of expectations is quite different

than the usual vague "You should try harder to be more efficient." Although this kind of verbal contract doesn't carry legal weight, it certainly carries with it more demand for performance than a general understanding would. With a difficult employee with whom multiple confrontations have been required, it may be useful to write out an actual behavioral contract and have the employee sign the contract.

John's supervisor needed to have him finish his client case notes by the end of March. He wrote this behavioral contract with John and had John sign it. "I, John Jones, will complete case notes on 42 clients by the end of March. This will require my completing 6 cases per week. My supervisor will assist me by having all of my calls held for 1 hour each day."

It is useful at this point to summarize what both you and the employee have agreed to do and by when you have agreed to do it. For example, a supervisor could summarize by saying "So I'm going to have your phone calls held every day for 1 hour. You are going to then finish 6 sets of notes a week until you have caught up with the backlog."

Follow up to see if the plan is working

Most traditional performance appraisal systems build in a 6-month or 1-year follow-up period. For evaluating the effectiveness of a plan, it is often best to follow up in 2 or 3 weeks to see if the plan is working. That way, if the plan is not working, some changes can be made along the way. For example, John's supervisor set a deadline of 2 months for all case notes to be complete. After 1 month and 2 weeks, he still did not have any of the notes. In this case, the plan was clearly not working and needed to be revised, but too much time had gone by before this became obvious. Short-interim follow-up periods may strongly communicate that actually carrying out the plan is important. Again, with a very motivated employee, it may not be necessary to build in very specific follow-up periods. However, with an extremely unmotivated employee, very frequent follow-up periods may be critical.

It is usually more useful to confront a problem frequently over short periods of time than it is to confront the problem every now and then over a longer period. There is a story told in management circles of a town that was struggling with violations of its regulation against overnight parking on streets. The police would ticket once a month, and everyone still parked on the street. When police

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began to ticket every night, the incidence of overnight parking dropped 75 percent in 2 weeks. Confronting an ongoing problem every several months may inadvertently communicate to the employee that the problem is not that important. With difficult employees, continuing to do the problem behavior may be worth infrequent conferences with the supervisor. As a supervisor, you may say, "I don't have time for all of this follow-up." But as time consuming as this process is, you need to ask yourself how time consuming the problem is over an extended period. The time spent in the short run to really solve the problem may save time in the long run.

The Process in Practice

Since the purpose of giving criticism is to initiate a problem-solving process, it may be helpful to see an example of how an interaction might look from beginning to end.

Dee is the office manager of a large insurance company. She has been a supervisor for about 3 years and in that time has built a good working relationship with most of the workers in the office. Recently, however, a new employee has been transferred into her unit from another office. This employee does very good work when she works, but she is frequently talking to other employees away from her desk or talking on the telephone. For this reason, her output is lower than that of the other workers.

Dee: Jesse, I wanted to talk to you about a problem that I have begun to observe with your work. You do a very excellent job when you sit down and work on reports. I've noticed though that you often . . .

Jesse: Wait a minute, I . . .

Dee: Just a minute, Jesse. Let me finish. Then I want to hear your reaction. I am concerned about the fact that you get up and talk to others or make phone calls and as a result are not getting as many reports done as you could. (describe) This makes you look bad and it also creates tension in the office because others either can't work when you are talking to them or are forced to do more to get work out. (express) I'd like you to limit your talking on the phone or to other employees to breaks. (specify) Are you willing to do this?

Jesse: At the other office where I worked, they weren't such slave drivers. All of us used to talk. That's what made the job fun.

Dee: So the change in rules in this unit is a little hard to get used to.

Jesse: Yes, I don't see why you have to be so rigid about it.

Dee: If it were not interfering with getting reports done, I probably wouldn't be, but it is. I know that you can be an excellent employee here and I don't want this problem to interfere with that. (positive consequences)

Jesse: Well, I think that I do enough reports anyhow.

Dee: How many reports do you complete in a day?

Jesse: About 10.

Dee: We try to get at least 60 reports a day out of the office. That means each person will probably have to do at least 15 per day. Are you willing to limit your conversation and work on increasing the number of reports you complete each day?

Jesse: What about the times when I have to go to the stockroom for supplies?

Dee: Certainly going to get supplies is legitimate, but I would prefer that you not stop to chat with others on the way back. You will have time to talk on breaks and at lunchtime when it won't interfere with anyone's work.

Jesse: I guess if I have to do it, I will. It just seems like a pain.

Dee: I can understand that it is a pain to be in a job that demands more than you are used to. I'm hoping that you can find a way to get the work done here and still enjoy yourself because I think we could have a good working relationship if you can get used to this way of doing things. Are you willing to limit the talking and work on getting out more reports?

Jesse: OK.

Dee: Let's get together in 2 weeks and see how it's going.

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This dialogue shows a number of things that may be useful to the supervisor in her work with this employee. The first is that she has not been sufficiently clear about her output expectations for the employee. At this point, the employee does not see anything wrong with what she is doing and needs to be helped to understand what's required. Second, the rules in the employee's previous job were quite different. This means that the supervisor will have to watch for other differences and help to keep the employee aware of new rules. She may also have to continue to give the employee opportunities to express her frustration about the new policies and procedures. Third, the approach described here is Level III muscle —quite firm but no adverse consequences are stated. Of course, if the behavior were to continue it would be necessary to state adverse consequences in the next interaction with the employee. The approach is also fairly specific, as it would need to be with the relatively unmotivated employee depicted here.

Summary

The purpose of assertive criticism is to confront problems in a way that elicits the employee's cooperation in the problem-solving process. Nonassertive criticism is too little, too late, and aggressive criticism creates defensiveness and resistance. Assertive criticism is the first step in the problem-solving process. It opens up communication, does not fix blame, focuses on behavior, not personality, and is objective.

The steps in assertive problem solving are: calling the employee's attention to the problem with assertive criticism, discussing the causes of the problem with the employee and eliciting her perspective on the problem, developing a plan of action to solve the problem, getting a commitment from the employee to the plan, and following up to see that the plan is working. Poor models for giving criticism in most people's families and destructive feelings and thoughts make delivering good criticism particularly difficult for most supervisors. Working to become calm, objective, and confident may be an important part of learning to criticize assertively. "The DEESC Script, developed by Bower and Bower in *Asserting Yourself* (1976), is a model for assertive criticism. With the DEESC Script, you *describe* (D) what the employee is doing that creates problems, *express* (E) why that behavior is a problem, *specify* (S)

what you want the employee to be doing instead, and outline positive or negative consequences (C) for either succeeding or failing to change the problem behavior.

A good description of problem behavior is objective, nonjudgmental, and specific. Behaviors need to be confronted if they interfere with productivity, violate rules or ethics, create problems in work relationships, damage the employee's position in the organization, or damage the image of the organization. Expressions of why a behavior is a problem are more effective when they focus on the effects of the behavior, rather than just your feelings. Expressing positive feelings or hopes about the relationship can be helpful. When specifying the desired behavior, you need to know what you want the other person and yourself to stop doing, start doing, and keep doing. It is usually better to let the employee suggest ways to bring about the changes in her behavior. The desired behavior should be expressed specifically and behaviorally.

The consequences of not changing behavior are stated using the four muscle levels. In early interventions, it is best to state positive consequences for change. However, if change does not occur with low-power interventions, you must apply consequences of increasing seriousness to help bring about change. You must try to develop consequences that matter to the employee, get backing from others in the organization to apply serious consequences, and closely document employees to have access to high-power consequences. Consequences should be outlined matter-of-factly and be accompanied by the statement that the employee has a choice to make about changing her behavior.

To deliver criticism successfully there are several things you should remember: use voice characteristics and body language that are assertive and deal with your anger before beginning the criticism; when delivering the script, go through at least the describe, express, and specify portions before allowing interruptions by the employee; realize that an initial negative reaction to the script does not mean that the criticism won't work; if the employee did not understand the script, ask her to summarize and then clarify misunderstandings; confront only one or a few issues at a time; give the employee a frame for understanding where the problem fits in her overall behavior; choose the time of the confrontation carefully; and recognize that changing long-term habits will require a number of confrontations.

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After delivering the criticism, continue with the problem-solving process. Discuss the causes of the problem with the employee and elicit her perspective on the problem. This lets the employee express resistance or frustration, uncovers causes for the problem, provides information for devising a better script, and allows the employee to get beyond excuses for behavior to problem solving.

Next, ask the employee to develop a plan of action to solve the problem. The less motivated the employee, the more specific details of the plan you will need to supply.

Then, get a commitment from the employee to the plan. The commitment is a verbal (or sometimes written) contract between a supervisor and employee to carry out certain behavior. You need to follow up to see if the plan is working. It is usually more useful to confront a problem frequently over a short period of time than every now and then over a longer period.

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