



## **When the worker is blaming or shaming**

The other side of this concept is in avoiding encouraging blaming or shaming on the part of another person without humiliating them in the process. For example if an employee says that everyone is out to get him or her and they have the emails or voice messages to prove it, rather than gathering the evidence (unless of course this could be a criminal case of harassment) or taking sides, recognize the hurt or distress the person is experiencing and help them focus on ways to move forward using the type of language described above.

It is less about shutting them down or refuting their accusation as it is about asking “what can we do to make this right going forward?”. Resist minimizing or refuting their feelings of hurt, betrayal or humiliation and instead help find a path that allows all parties to “save face”. This means that everyone can walk away with a sense of dignity that allows them to engage in a new way of interacting.

When an employee demands an apology, you might ask the purpose of seeking an apology. It rarely makes things right and whenever an apology is demanded, it is not likely to be sincere. Instead of platitudes, the solution might be in behaviours or actions expected in the future. For example if someone was gossiping about a worker, the way forward may be to set the record straight about any untruths. This can be done in a number of ways by you or by others and should always include an agreement with stakeholders of refraining from speaking in a derogatory way about others in the future. The difference between a forced apology and an agreement to change behaviours going forward can often mean the difference between a hostile truce and a new opportunity for healthier interactions.

## **Self-shame, self-blame**

Recognize also that some people internalize the stigma surrounding mental illness. Those who, through little fault of their own, end up experiencing depression or anxiety-related illnesses, may feel ashamed or responsible for their condition. It is for this reason that it is prudent to resist gossip or innuendo about your worker’s condition. Saying plainly that there is a health condition that requires reasonable accommodation is sufficient to justify changes in work processes. But this alone is not enough. If we do not help the individual to engage in workplace behaviours that are reasonably acceptable to others, we will not be able to stop the negativity or isolation they will face from others. When we help someone succeed at work, we are also helping others to see them as a successful contributor. And when we treat people as if they are successful and a valuable member of the team, others are much more likely to follow our lead. As the saying goes, the speed of the leader is the speed of the gang. If you speak respectfully about all people, your team might understand this to be the expectation for their behaviour as well.

## **Recap**

- Blame and shame usually causes us to react emotionally
- Redirect blaming or shaming talk (your own and others) toward solutions
- Where possible neither agree nor disagree – just redirect
- Resist minimizing or refuting feelings
- Avoid he said/she said traps
- Respect privacy, but address the workplace issues