

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

1/1/2023

Tell It Like It Is

Glenna Hecht

Growing up, I would weave stories to avoid getting in trouble. I believed if I told my mom a softer version of the story versus the actual occurrence, the outcome would be less severe. Was I wrong! Sometimes I would create a musical theater production to illustrate my actions. Mom was entertained by my acting and singing talent, but the punishment was never reduced. Mom saw through my feeble attempts to gloss over bad behavior. In the end, my tactics always had the same outcome, “Tomorrow, you cannot ride your bike after school.”

She would look at me with that “mom face.” With one raised eyebrow and a serious expression, she would say, “Glenna, painting a rosy picture that is not true is a lie. It reflects your integrity and that is not who you want to be. When you tell the truth, tell it like it is.”

Those were incredibly wise words, though it took me time to understand and put them into practice. When you tell it like it is, you can quickly get to the root of a problem, find a solution and learn from it.

I recently experienced a situation with a client and mom was sitting on my shoulder saying the words “tell it like it is.”

A leader contacted me and asked for employee relations advice. A manager didn’t agree with the direction his supervisor gave him and called him an a*****. The leader asked me if they could fire him for this comment since it wasn’t aligned with the values of the company. And wasn’t it insubordinate behavior?

I asked the leader, “Did the supervisor deserve it? Was he acting like an a*****?”

The leader said, “That is a good question. I don’t think so.”

When an employee-relations situation is brought to my attention, I ask three questions to gain context.

1. Is this typical behavior for the employee? If yes, describe it. If no, what’s the typical behavior?
2. Has this behavior been previously discussed or documented? If so, when? Gather the documentation to review.
3. Is anything going on in his/her life? This doesn’t excuse the bad behavior, but it provides context and may explain any unusual behavior.

The leader responded, “At times, he’s been gruff and we’ve coached this in the past. He’s having some family issues and that may have caused this outburst.”

We both agreed the manager exhibited poor judgement with his supervisor. I recommended the leader and supervisor talk with the manager and give him a strong warning to ensure it doesn’t happen again, and if it does, to understand the consequences.

Two days later, the CEO and leader called me.

The CEO said, “Glenna, I’m really disappointed in you!”

I was taken aback and asked, “Why?”

The CEO said, “I cannot believe you won’t let us fire this guy for calling his supervisor a “f***** a***** in front of the team! That is inexcusable behavior.”

I replied, “What?! I didn’t know he said that. Certainly, if I’d heard that he used those words in front of the team, I would have made a different decision. That’s bad judgment and inexcusable. Can this outburst be confirmed?”

The CEO asked the leader, “What exactly did he say?”

The leader didn’t pause and immediately responded, “He called his supervisor a f***** a*****.”

I said, “This behavior isn’t aligned with the values of the company and indicates bad judgement. It’s insubordinate and the manager indicated that he’s not a role model for the team. So you’re correct—he needs to be terminated for his behavior. This may be a one-time occurrence, but it’s egregious.”

I asked the leader to call me so that we could prepare for the conversation.

When I spoke with the leader I asked, “Why didn’t you provide the full story the first time we spoke?” With one raised eyebrow, I could feel my “mom face” emerging.

The leader replied, “I’m a gentleman and I don’t speak that way in front of a lady.”

I said, “I appreciate your level of respect and consideration, but you need to tell it like it is so that we can make the appropriate decision quickly. In the future, document the statement of others in quotes. That way YOU aren’t making the inappropriate comment—you’re repeating the words of others. If it’s nasty, YOU aren’t being disrespectful, they are!”

The leader said, “I can do that.”

This is a great example that illustrates why it’s important to tell it like it is. When you understand the situation, history and facts, you gain context and can make a sure-footed decision.

Just imagine if we’d followed our initial course of action—the team wouldn’t respect him, follow him and would believe this type of behavior is acceptable in the workplace.

Mom was right! “Telling it like it is” is respectful, solution-oriented, productive, minimizes second-guessing and provides an opportunity to learn for the future. **GT**

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