Having a “Consequence Conversation”

We first introduced the term “Consequence Conversation” in 2005. We must explain what it means and how we’d advise anyone to use it. It is the term rather than the concept that is regarded as new. Many people will conduct a consequence conversation without thinking as their logic tells them they must introduce the possibility of consequences.

One of the main reasons we introduced this term is the many discussions we had with people in organisations who should have mentioned possible consequences before implementing them due to poor behaviour or actions! Often, those receiving the discipline had been unaware their job was at risk, so it was a complete shock to them and their colleagues and impacted morale greatly.

We believe any conversation to help improve a person’s behaviour must come from a supportive approach. If our people become used to their leaders and managers always approaching situations with their best interest at heart and balancing it with the organisation's values and expectations, their approach will almost always be received in the right way. Trust comes from consistency.

Imagine a scenario where Mac’s behaviour has not been good. He had caused upset among most of his team, and colleagues in other teams had also commented that he can be rude and even arrogant. This must be addressed promptly, as this is the second time he’ll have been talked to. Due to this being the second time, we need to add the possible consequences into the conversation so that Mac is aware and hopefully motivated to consider and change his behaviour. Also, if these consequences are employed later due to his continued poor behaviour, it will be his fault, as they were mentioned previously and more than once, too—so no surprises for anyone.

When we look at this from the perspective of someone in the team, or someone from another team, or it is talked about later as such things always are. The conversations will promote that the whole process was fair, that Mac was given plenty of warnings and opportunities to improve, and that he brought the consequences upon himself due to his lack of improvement.

A sentence we advise all those conducting a consequence conversation to use is, “Please don’t **make me** have to come back to talk to you about this again, as I don’t want to see these consequences be put into effect. That’s why I am here now supporting you.” (Or similar words).

If we are clear right from the start of a situation, we can improve things far quicker. If our actions as a leader or a manager allow others to feel things were unfair or that they too may be at risk, it can cause undue worry and concern and even begin rumours and, worse yet, create saboteurs! It takes very little negativity to convince people that the world is against them. So, a little forward planning and commitment to doing things right will help us all in the future.

Remember, as a manager or leader, you are the first point of intervention as the person reports to you. But we must always be conscious of our HR department, as they may need to collate the evidence required for proceedings if things get that far. So, do not find yourself in a position where you must inform HR that you don’t have any evidence to support the case. Always be part of the solution, not the problem.