

(U) Ask Zelda!: Calming a Choleric Co-worker

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) The following article is unclassified in its entirety.



I'm sure a few people have worked with (or are currently working with) employees who have such a short temper that they must resort to foul language, slamming things (e.g., keyboard, mouse, book) when they get emails or phone calls that spin them up. This is not only distracting, but is downright unprofessional. At worse, it could lead to damage of equipment or personal injury. What is the most appropriate way to tackle this without escalating the situation, BUT to be mindful that something might need to be done if they keep it

up?

-- Fed Up with the Fuming

Dear Fed Up,

Anyone who works with a tantrum-throwing hothead has my sympathies. For me, that kind of behavior constitutes a hostile work environment. The area supervisor should deal with it immediately; but it appears from your note that they haven't, since you wish to remedy the situation without bringing it to the boss.

Phase I - Awareness

I prefer to start with some light humor or good-natured concern. Something like "Hey, take it easy, I might have to report you to the **ASPCA** for cruelty to your mouse" or "Sounds like you got some bad news. I hope everything's okay..." Calling attention to his behavior in a non-confrontational way may be enough to get him to stop by reminding him that his outburst was noticed by others. If that's not sufficient, proceed to Phase II.

Phase II - The Polite Request

If it continues, ask the "riled child" to stop the behavior. Suggest that he take a walk around the building to cool off or find a more appropriate outlet for his anger. Come right out and say that his behavior is offensive or that the noise is preventing you from getting your work done. If this is a habitual thing, you could even politely recommend that he consult **EAS** for help dealing with the issue and how much it's upsetting him.

Phase III - No More Mr. Nice Guy

If the previous two phases get no results, here's where you draw the line. I would now bring the

problem to the supervisor's attention.

If you are still reluctant to escalate it, you can tell your short-tempered colleague--in a more serious tone--that you've tried to discuss this nicely, but failed to see any change in his behavior. Reiterate that his actions are inappropriate for the office and that he needs to stop the behavior (be specific) immediately. You can either imply or state outright the "or else" of escalating it to management.

Your challenge will be to stay calm if he starts to rage. Don't escalate to his level. Your relationship with him should determine what specific approach you take. (If he's a friend, you can probably get away with being more frank.)

It's laudable that you are willing to take on this challenge--I'm sure your other co-workers will be very grateful if you can manage to tame the roaring lion in your office.

Editor
