

# 33 Scripts

to Address Disruptive  
Behavior When You  
Don't Know What to Say


Strategies for  
Healthcare Leaders





There is an epidemic of bullying and incivility in healthcare that not only affects morale and turnover, but it also affects patient outcomes. The problem is that front line leaders do not always know how to address unprofessional behavior, especially with employees who are so clinically competent.

When disruptive behaviors go unaddressed in healthcare, bad things happen to patients and employees. However, the problem is that leaders don't always know WHAT to say or HOW to confront an employee who is behaving in an unprofessional manner. Therefore, they often do what's comfortable – they do nothing. As a result, we are hemorrhaging really great employees and harming the very patients whom we're serving.



Nobody likes to confront. That's why we've made it easier for you by providing you with powerful scripts you can use to handle 8 common situations that show up in the workplace.



# Powerful Scripts for Leaders

## When you have to confront an employee and want to reduce defensiveness:

*“Help me to understand what happened...”*

*“I was told...Walk me through what happened yesterday/this morning so that I fully understand.”*

*“Let’s discuss what just happened so that it doesn’t happen again.”*

## When dealing with an employee who lacks self awareness:

*“I’m not sure you realize this/are aware. Sometimes you come across as abrasive/intimidating/condescending.” And then provide a specific example.*

*“I’ve noticed that you can be...” And then provide a specific example.*

*“It’s been brought to my attention on numerous occasions that...”*

## When employees complain to you about their peer:

*“I think it would be more helpful if you talked to him about how you feel, rather than to me.”*

*“If the situation were reversed, would you want your peer to come to me or directly to you?”*

*“Are you complaining or sharing a concern?”*

*“How does this affect your work?”*

*“You seem really upset. Have you had a conversation with her/him about this.”*

## When you witness or are told that employees are gossiping about each other:

*“This sounds like gossip to me.”*

*“Is this your opinion or do you have evidence.”*

*“Not here – Not now.”*

*“I don’t think it is fair to talk about someone who is not in the room.”*

*“How do you know this to be true?”*

*“This is not an appropriate conversation to have in patient care areas.”*

## When an employee is overtly rude or disrespectful to you in front of others...

*“It’s not okay for you to speak to me like that.”*

*“I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t speak to me like.”*

*“The way you’re talking to me right now is disrespectful/rude/unprofessional.”*

*“I am willing to listen to you as long as you are willing to talk to me with respect/as a professional.”*



## What to say to an employee who is clinically excellent yet is NOT a professional role model.

*"You're an excellent clinician (give a specific example). However, the way you treat others is unprofessional/disrespectful (give a specific example)."*

*"You are really good at (insert skill), therefore, I expect you to also be a role model for professionalism."*

*"This is a professional environment and you have not been treating your colleagues like professionals."*

*"It's not okay the way you've been treating your peers. Possessing excellent clinical skills is not an excuse for rudeness."*

## When you need to talk to your employee about a pattern of unprofessional behavior.

*"I'm concerned about..."*

*"I've noticed a pattern of behavior that is concerning..."*

*"It's been brought to my attention numerous times that you are (name the behavior)" and then say, "Is this true?"*

*"It's been brought to my attention numerous times that you are (name the behavior)" and then say, "Starting today, I never want to find out you've behaved this way again."*

## When an employee is acting in a very negative and unprofessional manner in front of others.

*"The way you're acting right now is unprofessional."*

*"I would appreciate it if you wouldn't speak to me/her/him like that because it's unprofessional/disrespectful."*

*Name the behavior first and then say, "You're yelling/arguing/criticizing in front of people and you need to stop."*

*Name the behavior first; ask employee to stop, and then say, "I see you are getting angry, so let's discuss this elsewhere (or some other time)."*

**We can no longer afford to use silence as a strategy. When leaders are equipped to address disruptive behaviors, the right employees stay and patients have better outcomes.**



*"Unfortunately dealing with disruptive behaviors is a part of every workforce. A lot of managers including myself are not equipped to handle difficult conversations. It is easier for me to give Kudos and appreciations for a job well done. I was very comfortable providing counseling for poor attendance or documentation issues; but for nonverbal or disruptive behaviors were definitely a challenge. The straightforward educational material and real life examples have given me the tools as well as the confidence to have the difficult conversation my whole team needs me to have in order to create a Healthy Workplace for each of them. Thank you Renee and Team"*

- Gina McDaniels

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