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Reprimands

By Richard Lowe

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One of the most terrifying experiences of my life was way back in the early 1970s. I spent 6 years of my late teens in a little town called Lake Arrowhead in California. I was living with my parents, working at night in a supermarket (the dairy manager), going to college, and holding other odd jobs as I could find them.

It was a very dry summer, and I remember those long daily drives up and down the mountain (a forty mile commute), without air conditioning and miserable. I was, however, becoming a very responsible young adult and took everything very seriously.

One day I was driving down the mountain to school as usual when I drove past a fire. I should have stopped, but I was running late and continued forward. Before long, there was another fire beside the road, then another. A few minutes later, there were fires all around me and it was getting hotter and hotter. I thought about going back, but a glance in the rear view mirror showed it was probably just as bad behind me as it was in front of me.

Fortunately for me (because otherwise I might not be telling you this story right now) some firemen noticed my predicament. They had water dropping helicopters in the area, and as I was driving forward, thinking that this was not really the time and place that I wanted to die, I found myself covered with thousands of gallons of water. I owe my life to those unknown firemen who saved me that day long ago.

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I learned something very important (besides a strong lesson that I had a brain and I should probably start using it more often). The time to deal with a problem is immediately. If I had stopped when I first noticed the fires I would have most likely been fine. But no, I had to go forward, ignoring the problem, until I was in so deep that I would have been lost without help.

Now that I am an executive at a multi-billion dollar company, I have applied this lesson over and over again. I use it every single day, and it works very well.

The time to deal with any problem is as soon as you notice there is a problem. The longer you wait, the more difficult the problem

is to handle.

This works with supervision especially well. Think of all of the situations you've had at work, and think how easy they would have been to solve if you had simply confronted them early on, before they became significant.

Many years ago, a peer of mine supervised someone who came back from lunch, how shall I say it, a little tipsy. The friend let this behavior slide because, well, he had a little trouble confronting the issue, and it just didn't seem that big of a deal. But, naturally, it soon became a huge problem which rippled throughout the company (well, it was a very small company with only a dozen employees) and led directly to that person being fired.

Now, if my friend had simply taken the employee aside the first time he noticed her coming back from lunch in that state, he may very well have prevented the entire thing from happening in the first place. However, since he didn't confront the issue, it became "okay" and, of course, the employee pushed the envelope further and further until it could not be tolerated any more.

Now, delivering this kind of reprimand can be very difficult, but it has to be done. What would I do now? Simple: as soon as I noticed the behavior, I would have taken the employee aside (always deliver reprimands in private) and just flat out told her that coming back to work with a few drinks under her belt is not acceptable. No emotion (that's very important), as little discussion as possible, and, if the behavior stops, that's the end of it.

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You see, what's important is the behavior. It does not matter one bit that the employee drinks – as a boss that's not my problem. It does not matter what the employee thinks about what I'm saying. The only thing that matters is the employee was behaving in a manner which was not acceptable at work. So that's all I would say.

Now, it's critical to understand that if the behavior repeats then the next level of reprimand needs to be done immediately. So if on Monday Ann came back to work from lunch drunk and I talked with her about it, then on Tuesday she repeated the behavior, I might escalate it to a formal oral warning. If the behavior repeated on Wednesday, then it might get up to a written warning. And on Thursday, she might get suspended for a day. And if it happened again, she might even get fired.

The point is the issue needs to be handled cleanly, immediately

and precisely. As a supervisor, my concern is about the workplace and about the quality of the work being done. Ethically and legally that's all I should be worrying about.

When I was a young manager, one of the mistakes that I made was to try and "soften the blow". I would hesitate, perhaps let the employee slide the first time the issue happened. During the reprimand, I'd want to discuss the problem, get their viewpoint and make sure they were okay.

Now I've changed and I've realized that employees (myself included) want to know the boundary's, they want to know exactly how far they can go before the line is crossed.

The best way to handle a reprimand is:

- Make sure you've got all your facts straight before you deliver the reprimand. Remember there is a difference between an investigation and a reprimand, and the two should never be mixed. If you are investigating, say so and ask your questions. If you are delivering a reprimand, again, say so and deliver it.
- Do not ever deliver reprimands based upon rumor or hearsay. Always check your facts BEFORE delivering the reprimand.
- Do not deliver idle threats during a reprimand. Just inform the person what will happen if the behavior continues, and if it

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does, then follow through. There should be no need to "bluff" – you are presumably the boss (otherwise why are you delivering reprimands) and have the authority to do what you say you will do.

– Base your reprimand on production, company policy and the law. For example, if you find out a young man who works for you is visiting strip clubs on Saturday evening (outside of work), well, it's really none of your business (as a boss). It might become your business if he started bringing your customers to the same clubs ...

– Don't play games. You are the boss, just be the boss.

– Stay ethical yourself. It's pretty silly for a boss to be delivering a reprimand to someone about drinking on the job if, say, he's doing cocaine in the back room each night before going home.

– Deliver the reprimand as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the worse the situation is going to get. Remember, in this universe, things tend to get worse if they are left unhandled,

not better.

– Keep your cool and be as unemotional as possible. Remember, your goal is to correct a behavior, not belittle a person or make them feel bad (or even good for that matter) or anything like that. You simply want to tell them something needs to be corrected and you want them to correct it.

– The correction should be immediate. For example, if the employee comes in an hour late on Monday and you tell them to come in on time from now on, and on Tuesday they are late again, then up the ante and deliver a stronger, more formal reprimand. It's usually not a good idea to give someone "some time" to fix a problem or correct their behavior.

– Don't necessarily start off "hard", especially if the employee is normally doing good work. You can start off with a question: for example, "I noticed you've been taking a two hour lunch the last three days, what's up with that?" If the employee has a valid reason, well, so be it. Otherwise, tell him it's not acceptable.

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– Modify your "hardness" to the employees productivity. Productive employees should always get far more slack than non-productive ones. If, for example, a traditionally difficult employee was late for work I'd probably start off the reprimand with a blunt statement "work begins at 9am and you need to be in at 9am". On the other hand, a productive employee might get a "hey, I noticed you are coming in late – what's up with that?"

– An exception to the above advice, however, is any kind of harassment. An employee has a right to expect a safe work environment. At the first sign of any kind of racial, sexual, religious or similar harassment, you **MUST** immediately send the whole matter over to your personnel department. Believe me, you want to handle these kinds of issues fast – and you want your personnel department dealing with them. For example, if a female employee tells you (or you find out) that she's being sexually harassed, then don't even question her any further – get her sitting down in front of the appropriate person in personnel **NOW** (or do whatever your company policy says to do – to the letter).

Let's say, for example, that you are in a meeting and you notice "George" give a "more than friendly pat" to "Tina" on the way out. Or perhaps, in the same meeting, you observe "Sam" make a racial slur about Arabs to an Arab employee. Report these **IMMEDIATELY**, regardless of whether or not you

supervise these people. There is **NO PLACE IN THE WORKPLACE** for this kind of behavior.

– Treat everyone the same. Let's say, for example, that you are not particularly fond of Martians, but you happen to have a Martian working for you. Treat the person as you would any other person and ignore his green skin. The point is simple. Outside of work you, the boss, can be as prejudiced as you want. At work, you have to treat them all the same, regardless of what you think. And, by the way, that's the law (at least it's the law in the United States).

– Don't buckle to their excuses and emotions (unless backed by facts). If you tell the person he cannot come back to work drunk, then don't fall for the tears and sad-story about how stressful work is and how they need to relax or something during lunch. Sure, work is stressful, but getting drunk at

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lunch and spending the rest of the day being silly and unproductive is still not appropriate.

– On the other hand, don't be a complete hard case. Let's say Sam is late for work and you take him aside and tell him it's not appropriate. Sam tells you, well, his mother is sick and he has to deal with her in the morning. Now you have solid facts and you can change to match the situation. Work with Sam to come up with an appropriate solution. Perhaps he needs to come into work at 10am and leave at 7pm for a month?

– Be aware of the law before you deliver reprimands, as you investigate, and while you are delivering the reprimand. For example, say Jane's productivity has been falling off and you investigate. You talk to her and find out she has asthma, and she has trouble working because the air conditioner is throwing dust into her face. Well, there are laws about Americans with Disabilities, and you must make a reasonable effort to make it possible for her to work. Period. So, if you find this out, the reprimand must change into a "what can we do to make it possible for you to be productive" meeting. It may be that you can salvage a good employee simply by adding a filter to the air conditioning for a few hundred dollars!

The point is very simple. You are the boss – act like it. If you find out someone is doing something wrong, then deal with it – immediately.

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets at <http://www.internet-tips.net> – Visit

our website any time to read over 1,000 complete FREE articles about how to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge.

The Easy Way To Avoid Discouragement And Confusion While Training Your Dog

By Jonathan Cheong

Rewards just may be the single most important motivator in dog training. Obedience training through the use of rewards and other positive reinforcements has long been recognized as the most effective method of reaching most dogs and getting the best possible results.

Making obedience training fun, and even making it a bit of a game, can be very important to keeping both the dog and the handler motivated and willing to learn. Incorporating a period of playtime at the beginning and end of every training session will make sure that every session begins and ends on a

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good note.

The most basic of all obedience commands is heeling, or walking with the handler on a loose lead. This is usually the first obedience behavior that is taught, and it is an easy one to teach through reward training. Begin by fitting the dog with a quality, properly fitted training lead and training collar. If you are unsure of how to fit the training collar, be sure to ask a dog trainer, or the manager at the store where the equipment is purchased.

Start walking with the dog, always being cognizant of the dog's position relative to your own. If the dog begins to forge ahead, gently pull on the leash. This will engage the training collar and give the dog a gentle reminder to slow down. It may be necessary to apply greater pressure at first until the dog learns to accept the correction.

If the dog begins to fall behind, slow down and gently urge the dog forward. The use of a lure, or a favorite toy, can be very useful when teaching the dog to walk at your side. By keeping the lure at the desired position for the dog, he or she should quickly learn the desired location.

Always be sure to provide plenty of praise, treats, toys and other rewards when the dog does what is expected of him. Dogs learn best by positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means that when the animal does what the handler wants, it receives a reward, which can be anything from a pat on the head to a treat to a favorite toy. At the beginning of training, even the slightest attempts to please the owner should be rewarded.

Training by using reprimands and punishment is not nearly as effective as training by using rewards. Dogs can become discouraged and confused by excessive amounts of punishment and reprimands. Reprimands may be required from time to time, to correct potentially dangerous behaviors like chasing or biting, for instance, but reprimands should be short and directly attributed to the problem behavior at hand. After the immediate danger has passed, the training should continue with reward based training and positive reinforcement.

For instance, if you come home and your dog is chewing the furniture or other inappropriate item, immediately give the dog a sharp "No" or "Off" and take the item away. Then immediately give the dog one of his toys or other items that he is allowed to chew on, and praise the dog enthusiastically when he takes the toy and begins to chew it. This will teach the dog to associate chewing some items, like his toys, with praise, and chewing inappropriate items with reprimand.

It is very important for the dog to make these associations, since it is very hard to change negative

associations once they have formed. It is always much easier to train proper obedience behaviors the first time than it is to go back and retrain a problem dog later on. That does not of course mean that retraining is impossible, it simply means that it is more difficult.

Teaching a puppy, or an older dog, to associate the behaviors you value, such as coming when called, sitting on command, walking at your side, chewing only on toys, etc. with happy, fun times is the basis of all successful dog training.

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