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# The Mathis Group's Messenger

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## Treating Employees With Dignity Reduces The Potential of Violence or Hostility On The Job

By Dr. Keith Mathis

Stress can cause people who are normally balanced to act in violent ways. It is common to hear instances on the evening news of an employee who assaulted another person because he or she became upset on the job. This kind of violent behavior is a common occurrence in modern life. Since it happens so frequently, we are in danger of becoming callous to the shootings and the acts of violence reported in the media. Because of the threat of violence at work, we must seek ways to protect others and ourselves in the workforce. In order to do this, we should follow two simple precautions.

### *We must take all threats seriously.*

When a person makes a threat on the job, it must be taken seriously. In one tragic situation, a young man went into a school building and began shooting. He killed several students.

When some of the children were interviewed after the incident, they said the student had told others what he was planning to do. The threats were not taken seriously, and many families were hurt because of it.

### *Leaders must confront those who make the threats.*

Some have pointed out that when people get angry they demonstrate their personal weakness or emotional immaturity.

Anger erodes self-esteem and destroys trust. Like lying and forgetting, anger results in a failure to communicate and can damage a relationship. When you're angry, or even irritated, you aren't thinking clearly or rationally. Things seem darker, less reasonable, and less tolerable to the angry person than they do to the same person in good-mood mode (McClain, G., LeVert, S., Breaking Bad Habits, 1998, p. 170).

As the preceding statement indicates, some people act irrationally and destructively because they are frustrated or not sure what positive steps to take in a given situation. Due

to this tendency, you may be the target of anger even though you are not the cause of it. Hostile events happen all around us.

Whether you are concerned about the possibility of a shooting at your company, an increase in aggression, or being the victim of an act of rage, it is clear that you must watch what you say and how you say it. When you need to confront a person, it should be with the least amount of embarrassment possible. People must be allowed to save face.



### Treating Employees With Dignity Builds Trust and Respect

Building trust and respect is not a one-time event. It requires the development of a culture that is characterized by integrity and fairness.

Companies often desire to operate with a high level of trust and respect, but they sometimes are not willing to focus on creating the values or behaviors that will reinforce these traits in a corporate culture. To attain this level, a company's leaders from the top down must consistently demonstrate respect toward every individual.

Supervisors cannot demand trust. It must be earned. Trust increases when employees feel their leaders care about them.

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*To take the wind out of an  
angry man's sails--stay calm..*  
E.C. McKenzie

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It also increases when employees are trusted with knowledge and when they have an opportunity to give input about the goals, philosophy, and direction of the organization.

James Van Fleet makes a suggestion about how to reduce the likelihood that others will be critical of us. He says,

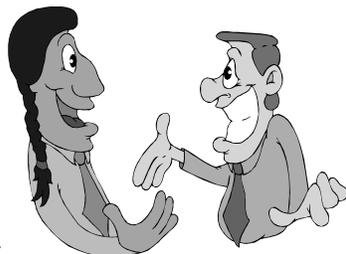
Dignity, first of all, means a state of being worthy and honorable. It means that one possesses complete control over his or her emotions and actions at all times. For instance, the manager who makes a complete fool of himself through loud and boisterous talk, obscene jokes, and vulgar language, excessive drinking, or the complete loss of emotional control in fits of anger is surely not dignified at all (Van Fleet, J., 1992, Prentice Hall, Take Control of People, p. 27).

Such involvement gives employees a better understanding of how corporate philosophy affects them at a personal level, and it helps them appreciate and support the mission and vision of the company. When that is the case, employees feel more secure about the direction in which they are being lead.

If you lead a large organization, it is essential that you be able to trust your subordinate leaders. Such trust is difficult for some leaders who want to direct every aspect of their organization. These leaders cannot find their way clear to trust people and, as a result, they do not nurture subleaders or give them the opportunity to exercise their full creative talents (Smith, Perry, 1993, Taking Charge, p. 1)

To earn trust, we must trust our people. Trust is defined as a "Firm reliance on [the] integrity, ability or character of a person" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1970, p. 1378).

How many people in management display the type of character that causes you to believe you can trust them? Some ruthless supervisors think you can run your company or department any



way you desire. Many will lie and play favorites with particular workers. They fail to realize the problems this will cause them with their people.

Our employees are looking for people of integrity to follow. When leadership lacks integrity, a decline in morale and an increase in negativity will soon follow. If this condition and its cause are not addressed, it will impact productivity.

The American Heritage Dictionary definition of respect says it means, "To feel or show esteem, to honor, to show consideration...to be regarded with honor" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1970, p. 1107). This definition does not mean that a manager should get his or her people together each day and sing kum-ba-ya or have group hugs. It does mean that every worker should be led in a humane way and that the self-esteem of the worker should be protected and enhanced.

A good leader's self-worth does not depend on winning every time. Secure leaders can compromise because they know that they do not have the only correct answer or solution to any problem. They recognize the multiple benefits of compromising-greater self-esteem and support among followers as well as future cooperation" (Bethel, S., 1990, Berkley, p. 183).

What would happen if every company treated all employees with this type of personal respect?



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