

HOW TO TELL AN EMPLOYEE HE SMELLS

— A Sample Script —



Dealing with an employee's hygiene is the classic tough conversation every manager dreads. But if foul odors are causing a stir, it must take place.

Too often managers try to soften the blow by adopting a non-confrontational, friendly tone while attempting to deliver a sharp and serious message. That mismatch of tone and message can leave the listener confused.

Difficult conversations always require honest and direct language, particularly a conversation about a person's body odor.

So take the employee to a private and neutral area (maybe even outside to improve ventilation) and use the following dialogue as your guide.

A Script of What You Can Say

"John, this is an uncomfortable conversation for both of us, but *I must call your attention to the fact several of your co-workers have complained* about unpleasant smells coming from your work area. *And apparently they are coming from you personally*, not from food or anything else in your work area. This is just as embarrassing for me to have to raise the issue with you as it probably is for you to hear it, but it has gotten to the point that *I must ask you to do something about it*. It is affecting the ability of your co-workers to concentrate and do their work properly. I do not know if this is a matter of personal hygiene or of unwashed clothes, but *I must ask you to attend to this matter*. You may not smell it yourself, but we do expect you to come to work bathed and wearing clean clothes. *Can I have your agreement* that you will do that starting tomorrow? This is a serious matter, and if the complaints persist, *I may have to send you home* until the problem is resolved."

Key Points to Remember

1. Keep the conversation short.
2. Be direct and honest.
3. Make your points clearly.
4. Outline what needs to be done.
5. State the consequences if that doesn't happen.
6. You're not inviting a discussion about this issue. If the employee does have some extenuating circumstance, it may be best to refer the employee to HR.

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