

5 Steps to Defuse Defensiveness

Defensiveness is an understandable response, but, writes Arianne Cohen on Bloomberg Businessweek, it deflects blame in ways that can send negative effects rippling through the workplace. She outlines the findings of a study in the *British Journal of Social Psychology* that examined how people in conflict can approach each other in more productive ways.

The study authors illustrate with an example of a colleague who goes into defensive mode to hide a minor on-the-job gaffe. To defuse the situation, you should make it clear to him that he's part of the team—respected, included, valued—and *then* address the issue.

Step 1: Share excitement about a future collaboration. People are more likely to confess their wrongdoing when they feel like an accepted member of the group. This can eliminate fear of rejection or ostracization.

Step 2: State the positive values that might have driven the colleague's defensiveness. For example: "You really care about social connection, and I know how you love to entertain us." Presume the honorable intentions to reaffirm his sense of being a good person.

Step 3: Let him describe what occurred: it's not your role to state what went wrong. Allowing him to identify things that aren't working for him will increase his sense of agency.

Step 4: Avoid guilt-tripping. As the conversation progresses, you don't want to put your coworker in the hot seat, even for a minute. Yes, he did the wrong thing, but his feelings of wrongdoing aren't productive.

Step 5: Smooth it over fast. Draw the map for immediate reintegration, so he can learn and repair things. The goal is to find the quickest route to reconciliation.



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5 Must-Have Skills to Get Ahead

Want to move up the ladder at work? Hard work, timing, and even luck all can play roles. But one ingredient is essential if you're going to advance and succeed — effective management leadership skills. People aren't born with these skills, writes Kate Ashford on Monster.com; they must be learned. To boost your odds of finding success on the job, she suggests brushing up the following:

1. Self Awareness

Know your strengths and weaknesses. Researchers have found that the one skill up-and-coming leaders regret not working on more is knowing themselves. It's critical to recognize your blind spots, how you're built, how you communicate, and what satisfies you. If you don't, you'll constantly be looking for those answers in others, which can get in your way. To be clear, Ashford says, you *should* seek and be open to feedback — that helps you gain self-knowledge. Requesting feedback tells people you're trying to improve and you value their opinions.

2. Decision Making

Managers have to be able make the tough decisions without waffling, and they have to be able to do so repeatedly. Leaders set the direction and the tone. It's easy with the Internet to believe the single right answer is out there, and it's just a matter of searching for more information to get you there. But the need isn't for more information so much as direction. Leaders know how to make an imperfect decision based on currently available information so that the people around them are empowered to move ahead. Without such decisiveness, you and your team can end up going in circles.

3. Time Management

For individual contributors, Ashford writes, much of the work is reactive and task-based. The scope of work is by definition defined and limited, so time management isn't as monumental of an issue. Managers, on the other hand, can reach a point where they can't possibly get everything accomplished in 40 hours per week, and they generally can't do everything they'd like. Time management and prioritization are key. Ashford says you also need to work hard to establish boundaries around the things in your personal life that are valuable for you. For example, you might need to get comfortable establishing boundaries that let you leave work in time to take a yoga class twice a week.

4. Delegation

A crucial component in time management is the ability to delegate tasks and responsibilities. This can prove challenging when you've become accustomed to being evaluated on your personal performance. It might seem wrong in some way to produce less when you're promoted. As a manager, though, you're assessed based on, for example, team output or employee satisfaction. That's a good thing — because you can't do everything yourself, and delegation actually is part of your job.

5. Verbal and Written Communication

Even if a new job doesn't directly involve speech-giving or drafting reports or analyses, management requires constant communication about workflow, deadlines, priorities, and the like. Your team can't read your mind; you'll need to clearly tell them what's important, what they need to do, and when. Bear in mind that communication is a two-way street. You also must be a good questioner and listener. Ashford says you should check in with people and encourage questions to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Burnout Can Find You Working at Home

Work has changed dramatically during the pandemic, but one thing hasn't — the risk of burnout. It turns out that working at home in your pajamas doesn't shield you from the risk. The folks at Monster.com looked into this new twist in the familiar phenomenon.

For starters, they note that many people are working more hours. According to a National Bureau of Economic Research survey of 3.1 million people working at 21,000 companies in North America, Europe, and the Middle East, the workday has increased by 48 minutes, meetings are up by 13 percent, and we send an average of 1.4 more emails per day.

The Monster article attributes this in part to a "frenzied need to plow through our work" and stay productive. Psychoanalysts explain that such obsessiveness reflects the pretense that we can hold on to the world as we know it if we work hard enough.

But that's now it plays out in real life. Not all momentum is good momentum. In fact, the article says, without strategy, momentum can keep us just running in circles.

In the end, we have two options: 1) Continue "panic-working" ourselves right toward burnout. 2) Work smartly and accept reality, even when it's pretty miserable right now for many. The author wisely observes that no one can be a "source of help or comfort to others while buckling under burnout." Rather, burnout leaves us, well, kind of useless — exactly what you're trying to disprove by burning the candle at both ends.

So take time to "tame the flame." Exercise, meditate, and keep a realistic work schedule. And check in with coworkers to see how they're doing, too.



25 Workplace Comedies to Get You Laughing in Tough Times

The TV show "The Office" has enjoyed a popular resurgence during the pandemic. If you're looking for more workplace comedies to lighten the moment, *Variety* assembled a list of some of the other best over the years:

1. Cheers
2. Brooklyn 99
3. Archer
4. Scrubs
5. It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia
6. Police Squad
7. Get Smart
8. Newhart
9. Community
10. Frasier
11. Newsradio
12. Alice
13. Silicon Valley
14. Fawlty Towers
15. The Dick Van Dyke Show
16. The Larry Sanders Show
17. Veep
18. Buffalo Bill
19. Night Court
20. 30 Rock
21. Taxi
22. WKRP in Cincinnati
23. Mary Tyler Moore Show
24. Barney Miller
25. Parks and Recreation

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7 Steps to Become the Team MVP

Teamwork/collaboration is one of the most important skills an employee can have, writes Daniel Bortz on Monster.com. Here are several ways he suggests to make yourself a great team player:

1. Adhere to deadlines. Live up to your promises, especially in the group project context, where your delays can create a negative ripple effect across the team. Reliability is a surefire path to gaining your coworkers' goodwill and trust. So produce high-quality work *on time*.
2. Keep an open mind. The strongest team players solicit feedback from their teammates because they're open to other people's ideas and perspectives. They have strong listening skills and don't turn defensive in the face of constructive criticism.
3. Respect other people's work styles. The difference in various work styles is more apparent than ever in today's multi-generational workplace. You need to understand how each of your coworkers works best and tailor your communications accordingly.
4. Pivot promptly. Every team has its share of failures. But getting hung up on mistakes, Bortz says, throws a wrench in the gears of progress. You're better off moving in a direction that will work.
5. Don't play politics. Workplace politics make for a toxic work culture. Preempt the poison by treating coworkers with respect. If you have a problem with a peer, take it up with him or her directly first.
6. Focus on the big picture. Top performers put the team's interest ahead of their own. Your stunning presentation will mean little if the overall project doesn't meet its goals.
7. Celebrate your peers' successes. This is one of the easiest — and most powerful — steps to ingratiate yourself with your teammates and build solid relationships. Show humility, share credit, and be public in your appreciation of the efforts of others.