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Do’s and Don’ts for Responding When Your Behavior

is Perceived as Offensive

by Tom Sebok

DO . . .

1. Listen as non-defensively as you can.

2. Assuming it’s true, assure the person that you did not intend for them to feel

harassed, uncomfortable, or offended.

3. Tell the person you are sorry they feel the way they do as a result of your

behavior.

4. Assure the person that you want them to feel comfortable in your presence and ask

what you could do differently in the future so they would not feel that way.

5. Assuming the person’s request would not prevent you from doing your job, agree to do what

they ask to avoid the problem in the future.

6. Acknowledge that it may have been difficult for the person to approach you, given how

they felt, and thank them for telling you directly about their concerns.

7. Ask them to please let you know in the future if they ever feel uncomfortable

again.

8. Let them know they may speak with your supervisor if they would

like to (and who your supervisor is – unless you know they know) about

their concerns.

DON'T . . .

1. Say they “are being too sensitive,”

2. Say they “have no sense of humor,”

3. Say they “are a prude,”

4. Say they “are flattering yourself” (if they believe you made

unwelcome advances toward them),

5. Say they “are wrong,”

6. Say they “have mental/emotional problems,”

7. Threaten them,

8. Retaliate against them for complaining, or

9. Engage any further in the specific behaviors about which they are complaining!