

Escalating Scenarios Across Continuum of Workplace Behaviors

Developed by Fran Sepler from Sepler & Associates

This resource contains a scenario of fictional characters with the same main character whose behaviors escalate through the four stages of the continuum of workplace behaviors. **With each scenario we encourage you to discuss:**

- Which behaviors and actions do you identify that are examples of the current stage of the continuum of workplace behaviors?
- How might these behaviors impact the workplace culture as a whole?
- What intervention strategies could be used to address the situation?

Scenario 1: Respectful Stage

Manya is known as a fearless leader who takes new recruits into the field with support and acceptance. Her practices include an onboarding for political action interns that identifies Capitol Hill norms and beliefs, assigning people to work together on small, but attainable goals, and having weekly debriefs where everyone is encouraged to share learning, rather than accomplishments. She is particularly attentive to the interns building a support system among themselves and sets aside time to share her own stories of “learning the trade.” She is accessible and makes a point of spending time in the field with each intern individually, noticing their strengths and coaching them on developing their personal style of advocacy.

Scenario 2: Persistent Rude and Uncivil Behavior

Manya is a legendary lobbyist with a track record of success on issues from Israel to local food sourcing. Manya takes time with new recruits to let them know of her high expectations – being successful at lobbying means being present, being aware, and being sociable. She notices when someone falls short on any of these dimensions. She is not hesitant to criticize someone’s outfit,

their less aggressive demeanor, or their failing to be in the right place at the right time. Manya describes herself as “tough but fair,” and identifies “winners” and “losers” quickly, giving attention and support to the former, and declaring her limited bandwidth for the others. Even her own leaders cringe at Manya’s “constructive feedback,” but they recognize her success, her relationships, and her experience as vital to the organization.

Scenario 3: Bullying or Abusive Behavior

Everyone knows Manya is incredibly effective, has indirectly raised millions of dollars and successfully advances the organization’s policy agenda, but everyone also knows to steer clear of Manya when she is just coming back from vacation, is on a deadline, or someone has disappointed her. Manya is known to brutally insult people, pointing out that they are weak, lazy, or ignorant. Sometimes she says this directly to someone. At other times she will pass these opinions up the chain. If Manya is unhappy with someone, she will “ice them out,” and not respond to questions or requests for assistance, rendering them less effective. There are frequently tears or anger among Manya’s interns, which everyone knows is part of the job. No one is happy with this, but it is what it is.

Scenario 4: Protected Class Harassment

Manya is a big personality who builds her success by establishing social and policy relationships across denominations and the political spectrum. Working with Manya is challenging. She is not particularly helpful or empathetic but expects junior staff to follow her lead and to learn by example. Manya expects her people to be loyal, and she is prone to share negative or salacious gossip about other professionals, both within and outside the organization. Manya reminds people that she can do a lot for their career if they stick with her. In a meeting to discuss the aftermath of a recent compromise Manya and other advocates made with opponents, Manya remarked, “Life is tough and sometimes you just need to lie there and take it.” A junior staff member who was present was shocked, but, afraid of retaliation, waited over 2 months before confiding this in a senior staff person who immediately reported the remark.