



LET 'EM DOWN EASY FOR LEADERS

As the boss, you get the unfortunate job delivering bad news, disciplining inappropriate behavior or relaying less than positive feedback. Most leaders find these situations awkward and stressful -- did you know that firing just one person doubles your risk of heart attack? And, often addressing these situations creates resentment by the employee. So, how can you be fair and compassionate while also being honest? Let 'em down EASY!

The EASY script method is a skill development technique to use in awkward or difficult situations and conversations. This simple, readily applicable method guarantees that you are fair, respectful yet also firm. Here's the short version of how it works...

E	=	Express your feelings in a neutral manner
A	=	Address the situation with facts only, no emotion
S	=	Specify what you want the other person to do
Y	=	Yes or no commitment

Let's take a closer look at each of these steps, starting with expressing how you feel in a *neutral* manner. For many of us, when we are frustrated or upset, expressing those feelings often sounds as though we are blaming or accusing the other person. Blaming the other person shuts down the communication process because they are now busy defending themselves in their own mind.

Here are three neutral words that work well in almost any given situation: concerned, frustrated, and surprised. *Concerned* is a powerful relationship builder to voice a potential problem or introduce a sore subject. "Concerned" implies that you care about the situation or person and allows you to bring up the subject without blaming anyone. For example, you have a team member that is consistently late 20-30 minutes late every day. You can use 'concerned' this way: *John, I'm concerned about your attendance lately. You've been 20-30 minutes late for the last four days – is there a situation I need to know about that's keeping you from being on time?*

The word *frustrated* is an excellent word to use in place of "angry." Frustration is very tangible; people understand exactly how you feel when you are frustrated.

Most importantly, we become frustrated when we are trying to accomplish a goal, so being “frustrated” can be very results-oriented in our intention. Finally, frustration is temporary; people don’t stay frustrated forever--but they sure stay angry for years!

Try ‘frustrated’ in the following situation: you have a colleague that, despite your frequent efforts, refuses to cooperate or communicate with you regarding a project shared by both departments. You are getting negative feedback from higher ups and need to resolve the situation. *Ann, it is very frustrating when I approach you about solving the production problem with this project and you do not respond.*

The final word, *surprised*, is a terrific option to replace “disappointed.” Disappointment implies failure and makes most people feel guilty or despondent. Surprised, on the other hand, suggests you expected something else. It is less judgmental and may suggest you were unaware of information or a situation. “I’m surprised” is more powerful than “I’m disappointed.”

‘Surprised’ is an excellent choice in this scenario: you’ve spent a significant amount of time instructing a new team member in assembling a monthly report. When you finally get the report, not only is it late, it is also missing information. *Jim, I’m surprised by the report. We agreed that it would include a spreadsheet on the financial breakdown, yet this copy does not have one. What happened?*

Address the situation is the A in EASY. This is a very simple step: recap the facts as they occurred – and only the facts. Leave out any judgment or emotion and stay focused on the facts.

When you get to *specify*, the S in EASY, be sure you spell out your solution very clearly. Don’t be afraid to list it out in steps or set a deadline if appropriate. Be careful in assuming that the other person knows what you mean or “should” know. If they knew, they would do it. To be safe, be detailed in specifying your solution or request. Also, avoid phrases such as “I’d appreciate it if...” or “I want you to...”. The first is passive and the second can sound aggressive. To create a sense of urgency, try “I need you to...” “I need” is highly assertive and there is no doubt of your authority.

Finally, we get to *yes or no commitment*, the final step of the EASY script, and possibly the most important. Many times we present our request and then neglect to get a confirmation – either positive or negative. If the person remains silent or perhaps just smiles, we often jump to the conclusion that they agree. Actually, they don’t agree. Silence always equals no – they just don’t want to say it to your face and will probably email it to you later!

So, let’s put this all together and try a sample script. An employee goes to HR and reports that you are playing favorites. They have been corrected by you for a

specific behavior, however, they believe you are letting others get away with the same behavior instead of correcting them also. Following is just one option:

- E (express) Susan, I'm concerned to hear that you feel I am being partial to other team members.
- A (address) Human Resources has informed me that you believe I do not hold others to the same standards that I do you – what behaviors do you see that I allow others but no you? (Include time for the team member to give you her side of the story.)
Susan, because I respect the privacy of all team members, I address these behaviors in person, just like we are doing now. Although you may not see me address these individuals, rest assured that action is being taken while respecting everyone's privacy.
- S (specify) Let's do this – rather than report your concerns to Human Resources, I need you to come to me first. The next time you feel an issue is going unaddressed, let me know and we'll set time aside to discuss the situation. That way, we both can review the facts and decide the next step.
- Y (yes or no) Is this something you are willing to do?

In the above example, you've fairly addressed the issue without accusing or blaming Susan. You've expressed concern for the employee's feelings, given them an opportunity to be heard, and requested that they follow a chain of command by addressing you first. Best of all, you've handled an uncomfortable conversation with diplomacy and respect.

Using the EASY script is simple. It only takes a few minutes to jot down your thoughts to address the situation, and it's strongly suggested that you practice writing the script out the first few times you try it. The benefit of writing is that it anchors your script to your long term memory, so when the other person interrupts you, you can go back to your original plan or script. After you've written down your scripts 3-4 times, you'll find it's easy to use on your feet. So...the next time you get a situation that you know is going to be awkward, let 'em down EASY!

You'll find more ideas like the EASY script in the "I Wish I'd Said That" and "How to be more Assertive" programs by Allison Adams Blankenship. Allison gives your teams hands-on tools that are immediately usable. Call 800-644-7641 or visit www.PrecisionSpeaking.com to find out how to bring Allison and these programs to your organization.