

Conflict: Lessons for Grizzle

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Grizzle has reported to you for a few years now. They started out as a great addition with a keen eye toward broken processes in the systems of your team, which was useful because their predecessor had been with the organization for more than 2 decades. Two decades of humming along without questioning or challenging the status quo meant Grizzle was a breath of fresh air.

Now we are a few years in and seeing Grizzle's name in your inbox causes a deep sigh and occasionally a hand to forehead moment. "What now?" comes out of your mouth as you know it will be some form of complaint about a person, place, or thing. You have grown tired of the conversations via instant message, so you implemented bi-weekly one-on-ones to regulate the volume of grousing you hear. Now these meetings have turned into one long complaint no matter how hard you try to keep them forward focused.

You are left to wonder if termination is in the near future, although you know it requires moving a mountain to fire anyone in this place so it's not likely. Will Bowen, the author of *A Complaint Free World*, has an acronym (GRIPE) to help manage folks like Grizzle. Let's walk through your next bi-weekly meeting using Will's approach.

Grizzle comes to the meeting to express their discontent with a recent change in process in your department. This is the **Get attention** phase where Grizzle is looking to drain your brain of ideas and dump their discontent in your lap. Time to pause this path before you turn into a Zombie! Ask a few questions to interrupt the dialogue like, "What is going well?" or "How would you improve it?". Use "yes, and" instead of "but" to change the focus, which might sound like this: Yes, I hear you and I want to know what is working well.

You notice that Grizzle is focused on **Removing responsibility** from their contribution to the current situation. You are hearing a case being built for how Grizzle is not responsible and feel solicited to validate this victimhood. Likely you have seen this as a pattern of behavior and maybe have fallen into the trap of validation previously. Time for a new approach! Grizzle begins sharing how the process is confusing, not well-written and they can't be expected to follow so many small steps in a short amount of time. Use a couple of questions to bring responsibility back in the room (Grizzle) like, "How would you improve the wording?" or "What would you do to improve this process?" We remove any references to people not in the room so there is more ownership by Grizzle.

Over several conversations you have picked up on Grizzle's inclination to **Inspire envy**. It sounds like "I would make this better" or "if I were in charge this would be done." Or it could be "my boss is so

dumb/clueless.” Here’s an opportunity to catch yourself in this trap - do you find yourself complaining about how you would make this or that better? Learn from Grizzle, this envy isn’t productive. And, counter their comments with a compliment about their contribution instead of jumping on that bandwagon.

Complaints are currency, and over time Grizzle has cultivated a lot of money. Translate money into **Power** and now you feel how Grizzle’s complaints are starting to feel powerful while you feel powerless. When Grizzle begins complaining about a colleague, stop the conversation and invite the colleague to the room. Start with something like, *“I understand you are talking about Sizzle, let’s bring him in and have the conversation directly.”* At a minimum, these complaints diminish, either by your facilitation of a conversation between Grizzle and Sizzle, or because Grizzle has decided to not continue to avoid having the conversation. You will likely have to repeat this several times before the complaining actually stops because reducing the power takes a little while.

The reason you started the one-on-one meetings was to address Grizzle’s performance. You are a smart manager that knows you cannot **Excuse poor performance** as it impacts morale well beyond you and the person not performing. Grizzle is exceptional at pointing out that they don’t have the proper tools for the process, that someone else took their documentation of steps, or that their camera doesn’t work so they can’t be on screen. Excuses are one way to rationalize victimhood - how the world works against you. And, your silence is tolerance. Address this one both kindly and directly with a shift toward what you expect next time. Name it clearly, *“next time we meet I expect your camera to be on.”*

Managing people is complex. Emotional intelligence is a key ingredient and so is self-awareness. These two work together as cornerstones of communication, which has the most significant impact on success in career. The GRIPE model gives you an easy recognition and approach to communicating away from complaining. And Grizzle, becomes a better employee (and person) as a result.

For more information and further reading on Conflict, visit our [online library](#).



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Judy understands leadership and teams. And, she knows how to help you maximize the potential of yours. For over two decades, Judy has applied her vast knowledge of team dynamics, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, leadership, and finance to help organizations improve their people, process, performance and, ultimately, profits.

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