

Sizzling Hot

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Last month we introduced Grizzle, a relatively new employee who stirred conflict in you as a time drain in the complaint process. This month we have Fizzle, who has moved up in your organization over nearly a decade of employment. You've been her champion along the way, appreciating her growing skills but never directly working with her. Until now. Fizzle is now one of your direct reports, and supervising a small team that reports to her.

We have gotten to know Fizzle and Grizzle over the past few months. Through their stories we have discussed one way to manage conflict and how to bring accountability forward in a direct report. This time around we meet Sizzle, a colleague who has management responsibilities much like you do - a team underneath him, and several peers (like you) who manage other areas of the organization. The difficulty is that whenever you are in a management team meeting that involves questioning what processes or possibilities exist in Sizzle's area, he gets aggressive.

Most recently you were in discussion one-on-one with him about a specific issue that is causing your team a lot of difficulty and time. It appears to you that this could be remedied with some help from Sizzle's group, so you approach him to inquire about the time saving measure that you and your team have brainstormed.

Within seconds of finishing your sentence Sizzle responds, "you think I haven't thought of that" and "if you know so much about my area, why don't you take my job". You immediately back down, close out the conversation and walk away. And, this has now happened enough times that you want to address it, but how? And, to whom?

Let's begin with the considerations you can make about your behavior the next time you interact with Sizzle. Keep in mind that the situation doesn't escalate if you don't get drawn into the battle. That doesn't mean walk away again, as that is clearly not solving your problem, or your team's problem. Take a **slow deep breath and use a mild tone** in responding, "I know you are the expert of your area, that's why I'm talking with you". "This is our problem to solve and I need your help to find the solution."

If that doesn't drop the temperature of the discussion on its own, then **name what you are experiencing**. "I sense I have upset you" or "I am hearing a lot of emotion in your voice" are possible ways to name it. Then, offer to explore it - "can we talk about this emotion?" Using this approach will provide you a path to better understanding for both Sizzle in how he is received, and you, in how you can approach him for a better result.

This conversation will rise and fall on the defensiveness that emerges. Your role is to mind your shield. Even if Sizzle lobs a hurtful or angry statement, don't interrupt, keep your shield low, and listen. **Listen deeply**, and if you aren't clear, "help me understand" is a great way to get deeper in the clarity of it all. Remember Sizzle may offload some steam before you get to the good stuff, so **taming your judgment** is also critical to the success of your conversation (and possibly your relationship).

Of course part of keeping your judgment in check is to **focus on the issue**, not Sizzle himself. Remember this is about solving the problem with your team (and his team), not about whether he is a good (or bad) person. "Can we focus on how we can solve problems together" is a great way to bring it back should the dialogue slip away into personal characteristics.

Also important, is to **check for understanding** as you move through the discussion. "I heard this.... did I understand you correctly?" is one way to verify you are on the same path. And then you need a **plan**. Agree on specific action that will happen by a specific date, which likely ends up in another meeting where you discuss the issue, and the follow up to your approach to solving it.

Recognize that whether you have a Sizzle, Fizzle or Grizzle, changing behaviors takes time, and lots of reinforcement and reminders. We all desire to be understood, and we all want connection. Keeping this in mind as you begin this conversation will be useful mantras if the dialogue gets tough.

For more information and further reading on Conflict and Accountability, 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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