

# Do you need to silence an office buttinski?

**Question:** "I supervise our receptionist/secretary and share an office with her. When the director or other staff members come into the office to speak to me about a problem or situation, she interrupts the conversation, even when others are speaking, and will raise her voice so it can be heard above others. These conversations are not directed or pertain to her. I have spoken to her about this behavior and have written it up in her last evaluation. I could use some solutions to this problem, short of writing her up or suspending her without pay."

## Comments

I have seen this type before, every office has them, it is just very unfortunate that you have to share an office with one. That would drive me mad!! If you are her manager I would put her in her place, inform her that her behavior is a problem and if left uncorrected you may not be able to continue to allow her to work there. Then if she backslides, tell her that you expect a permanent change. Then a 3rd time, she is gone. It is a very uncomfortable, unprofessional environment that she creates for the other staff and allowing her to continue is unacceptable to them and yourself. She is the only one responsible for herself. If you keep on her she will weed herself out and may even leave before you ask her to. Trust me, the air in your office will be so clean and your other staff will love you.

**Posted by: Jocelyn | January 25, 2008 at 01:58 PM**

One thing that always grabs my attention is when my supervisor asks me to come to his office, looks at me meaningfully and then closes the door. It may be that you are just not giving or getting full attention to the problem and you need to focus exclusively on what's bothering you and how she can fix it. You might also ask if there is some reason for her behavior, prior to giving your constructive criticism. (Maybe she needs a hearing test).

**Posted by: Lshar | January 25, 2008 at 02:03 PM**

Is it possible that you could go to the conference room or to the other person's office to discuss a problem? It's bad form to discuss a problem in front of others anyway, so to give her an in is not the best idea to begin with. Your director should know better.

**Posted by: Jodi | January 25, 2008 at 02:05 PM**

I agree with Jocelyn. You have already spoken to her about her rude, unprofessional behavior & have written it into her evaluation. My suggestion: for the next 30 days, document every instance of her behavior and then have a meeting in which you tell her that the behavior has not improved (if this is the case) and give her a time

limit to show signs of improvement. You should ask her why she feels compelled to interrupt these conversations. And yes, some issues should be discussed in an area away from your office, but sometimes this is not possible. If there is no change in behavior, she should be terminated. Rude & unprofessional behavior should not be tolerated in the workplace.

**Posted by: Anon | January 25, 2008 at 03:04 PM**

I don't know if any of you have seen the movie office space or not but i believe that movie is the bible when it comes to work related problems. that movie depicts to a T what working in an office is like for 99% of people in in the business workforce. my answer to you inquiry is this, do what they do in office space..... move her to a secluded area, preferably a small storage room or basement, where she cannot be bothered or have contact what-so-ever, double her work load so she cannot have the time to be noising in everyone's business and leave it at that. if that doesnt work... i say its time for her to retire.

**Posted by: alicia granado | January 25, 2008 at 03:14 PM**

Alicia: the "buttinsky" is the receptionist who answers the phones and greets the visitors. She is the first person with whom people have telephone or in-person contact. The nature of her job makes it impossible to move her to a secluded area. Secretary-receptionists often have better receptionist skills than secretarial skills. If her secretarial skills are sufficient, perhaps she should be given enough work to keep her so busy that she can't interrupt everybody else.

**Posted by: Anon | January 25, 2008 at 04:38 PM**

How unfortunate you share an office with her. You could ask others in the office to meet you in another area, i.e., conference room, vacant office space, etc. to discuss things. Also, you didn't state whether this was the only problem you were having with this individual. If she is doing a great job in all other aspects of her job, you need to let her know that unless she improves in this specific area, she could be terminated. Sometimes associates who are doing a good job everywhere else feel as though they don't have to improve on "one" thing. And obviously, she feels comfortable enough in her environment and around you to "chime in" and give her two cents worth. YOU need to take the bull by the horns the next time it happens and correct her immediately after it happens. She needs to know this is not acceptable. Good luck.

**Posted by: | January 25, 2008 at 04:51 PM**

What about when the office "buttinsky" is your new supervisor?

**Posted by: Dawn E. | January 29, 2008 at 11:13 AM**

It is an unspoken requirement that Receptionist/Secretaries represent the first impression of the office. They must be friendly, cheerful, helpful, etc. Your employee may not be able to distinguish the borderline between friendly and meddlesome. Or, your employee may feel unappreciated; therefore, becoming obnoxious for need of acknowledgment that her position counts. Check yourself too, Mr. or Mrs. Supervisor, have you forgot to say 'good job' for what she does do RIGHT, or do you only see the deficiencies? I suggest that rather than threats

and punishment, perhaps saying 'good job' the next time she is silent but friendly will encourage the continued professionalism.

**Posted by: Sherry S. | February 01, 2008 at 01:42 PM**

I agree with Sherry S. You get a lot more with honey than you do with vinegar. She may be insecure and butts in for acceptance. Try acknowledging the good things she does. If you have addressed it with her, document it. Documentation is important in progressive discipline.

**Posted by: Jeanm | February 08, 2008 at 02:34 PM**