

How should I respond to condescending comments?

Question: "How do you resolve conflict and assuage damaging, condescending comments that are very subtly done? The comments come from a manager to an employee who (technically) does not report to him. He has had several reports lodged against him regarding this. All previous employees who complained are no longer here, but he is." — *Fed up*

Comments

You could say "Did you hear what you just said!" and or follow up with, I would appreciate it if you would show me the same respect you would like to have. I wouldn't suggest giving a taste of his own medicine, as there are those that really just don't understand what they sound like.

Posted by: Karen | November 02, 2007 at 03:34 PM

First, document every instance.

If you have access to a computer, search for resources to teach you to appropriately deal with negative behavior. Check your local library and book stores as well. The manager may be in a protected position, but, thanks to modern psychology, you can learn ways to diffuse his attitude while holding your ground, but without being insubordinate.

Also, this sounds like something that should be discussed with the person you directly report to as well as your Human Resources Dept. The old saying goes, "people will treat us the way we allow them to." Don't allow it, but don't cause a scene. You will definitely end up looking like the more professional, mature person.

Posted by: Christy | November 02, 2007 at 03:48 PM

Do not be rude or angry or raise your voice. Stay calm and patient and quietly say something like, "I would like for you to 'hear' what you just said to me." Then proceed to say exactly what that person said in the same manner in which that person said it. If s/he has any common sense at all, s/he will realize that the response was inappropriate and apologize. That is what I did to someone in the past and she apologized to me and after that we got along famously. But, hey, she could be the exception to the rule.

Posted by: | November 02, 2007 at 03:52 PM

I would respond with "gee, that sounded a little insulting; am I misinterpreting you or do you have some sort of issue with me you'd like to discuss?" or something similar depending on what was actually said.

Posted by: Another Karen | November 02, 2007 at 03:57 PM

If you choose to confront the issue with the person making the comments, remember to use "I" statements:

"Did I just hear . . . "

"I wonder if I'm misunderstanding what I'm hearing . . . "

"It sounds to me like . . ."

Keeping your comments on yourself can help defuse potentially explosive situations.

Also, remember that people who choose to cut others down are usually feeling poorly themselves and act that way to make themselves feel better. I'm not encouraging sympathy, but perhaps you could start your day on a positive note with the person? Compliment their shoes, or a job well done? It's easier to catch bees with honey than with vinegar . . .

Posted by: Allie | November 02, 2007 at 04:06 PM

Great suggestions from other posters. I was going to suggest saying, "I'm not sure what you mean by that." This will (hopefully) force the other person to explain exactly what he/she meant. It's a subtle way to take control of the situation, putting the instigator on the spot to explain/defend his/her remark. That way, you still come across as professional, and deflect inappropriate comments.

Posted by: Lisa | November 02, 2007 at 04:40 PM

People who make those sniper shots at others often are not aware of the effect they are having on others. I unfortunately used to work with someone who used to do that and did not realize she was doing it. What finally slowed it down (it never stopped) was others directly confronting her immediately as the comment was made, such as, "What do you mean by saying _____?" or "Am I understanding you correctly? You are saying this is my fault?" or whatever would be applicable to the comment involved. Once people started standing up to her, in a polite but yet assertive way, there were less and less of these types of comments.

Posted by: Mark | November 03, 2007 at 12:44 PM

Does anyone have a travel arrangement form. I had downloaded from this site years ago and it worked great. I have gone to another job and now I am need of it.

Thanks, Ann

Posted by: Ann | November 06, 2007 at 11:22 PM

I agree with Mark and most of the other comments, but confronting the person right after the comment is made such as "what did you just say, could you repeat that?". Once they have to repeat their no so nice remark and especially in front of other co-workers, might put a stop to the comments.

Elly

Posted by: | November 09, 2007 at 01:50 PM

I worked for just this type of manager for over three years. She was emotionally and mentally abusive, and she had physically lashed out several times over the years, including once toward me. Our pleas for help from upper management fell on deaf ears; they denied the existence of any problems, even though this behavior had been present for twenty years. The solution offered to me from Human Resources was, "I can see you're unhappy, why don't you quit today and we'll pay you for two more weeks, and you can find another job." I said, "No way, if I quit, then you win and you're NOT going to win." I eventually moved to another position and spent many, many months rebuilding my confidence and feelings of self-worth. The manager is still employed in her same position. I'm sad to say that the division I worked in was a subsidiary of a very, very large, well-known bank. I always thought that she knew something about somebody, and that's how she was able to keep her job. The lesson is that the boss's behavior won't change. Save yourself and move on.

Posted by: Minneapolis | November 09, 2007 at 05:11 PM

Document Everything. I just took another position during an investigation for harassment. Confidence and Self worth are terrible things to lose and it's so hard to get it back. Look for websites on office place bullying. Our Manager had so many characteristics of a bully and was being investigated. She was new in the company and she left by her third month. She knew they were going to let her go. If your company doesn't help, go to the EEOC. They will certainly help you. I won't go back to my old position because her bosses (who I used to work for) never backed me up during the 3 months she lasted. Your company legally should be following up on all complaints to avoid a law suit. I loved my old job and lost it to a bully boss. Document for a few weeks and then go to your HR department. If it's not handled, go to the EEOC. Who knows, she may have other complaints against her.

Posted by: M. | November 09, 2007 at 09:12 PM

I echo Mark's response, and suggest that you say it with a sense of humor, or at least a smile. If the person responds by repeating the same or similar comment, then perhaps say privately if possible, This really confuses me, or This is actually kind of hurtful to me and I wonder if you realize it, or are you just being funny-sarcastic? Direct confrontation works if it's done in a manner that does not escalate the other person's behavior. Documenting helps but it can be difficult to pin down the subtle types of insults. However, if the comments contain legally discriminatory/harassment type references, then by all means take it to the next level supervisor and ask for help.

Posted by: Pat | November 16, 2007 at 03:05 PM

If I read this correctly, the comments are being made by a manager to someone who is not his/her direct report, correct? This employee must have a manager that he/she does directly report to and, thus, he/she should be talking to their next in command about the situation. Regardless of that outcome, offer the suggestions made above to this other employee (e.g., asking for clarification about what was said, somewhat laughing it off as if you're in disbelief, etc.). Also suggest that he/she is never in the presence of this person without someone else around to witness the situation.

Posted by: Cindy Brock | November 16, 2007 at 03:17 PM

I agree with the above mentioned; however, I find that many such comments are done in the presence of

others. Do you address that person on the spot or wait to speak privately. Also, what if your boss is in the room and doesn't intervene?

Posted by: Rita | November 30, 2007 at 02:41 PM

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Posted by: Rita | November 30, 2007 at 02:41 PM