

Dealing with profanity in the office



Everyone gets frustrated, especially at work, and sometimes expletives slip out. While some employees don't mind, others find it offensive. How do you handle profanity in the office? That's what one reader asked recently on the [Admin Pro Forum](#).

"I am an administrative assistant at a very large company, and my cubicle is right outside the door of one of the directors. He happens to loudly use a particular common curse word whenever he's frustrated. I cringe every time I sense it coming. In most cases I try to scurry away from my desk, so I don't have to hear it, but sometimes I do get caught off guard. Do you have any suggestions for how I can deal with this, or approach the problem directly?" — *Anonymous & Frustrated*

Readers, etiquette experts and human resource consultants offered these solutions.

Be straightforward. When dealing with language you deem offensive in the workplace, be direct. Many readers in the Forum suggested either confronting the person, filing a complaint or asking to change workstations. "Being straightforward with the director, while uncomfortable, is the best first step," Forum reader Cristine wrote in a reply. Mark, another reader, wrote in the Forum that the employee may not even realize how much he is using inappropriate language.

Consider your culture. When there is profanity in your office, consider the work environment and context, says Rosalinda Randall, a civility and etiquette expert. Some offices also have more profanity than others. If your office has more profanity than you're comfortable with, readers suggested either wearing headphones or finding a new office.

Show respect for co-workers. While the occasional expletive may be OK, be respectful to co-workers. Bill Fish, founder and president of [ReputationManagement.com](#), says that "calling people names deemed as curse words or using hate speech will never be tolerated." Fran Sepler, president of Sepler & Associates and a human resources consultant, says profanity harms the work environment for your co-workers. "Frequent profanity degrades the quality of the work environment the way that smoking pollutes the air—it gives permission to be thoughtless and rude, even if the profanity is acceptable to all present," she says.