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Emotional meltdown

LOSING CONTROL What happens when the pressures of work get too much for an employee and it all bubbles up in an emotional outburst? How should managers handle such situations?

Jeevan Prakash Sharma

■ jeevan.sharma@hindustantimes.com

Impulsive behaviour can go against you. That's what one learnt from the recent incident involving L Sarita Devi. The Indian woman boxer was banned for a year for refusing to accept the bronze medal at the Incheon Asian Games 2014 due to a controversial decision against her. Where workplaces go, such incidents are occurring frequently. In fact, corporate leaders believe that in recent times they have come across increasing cases of bickering, outright animosity and negative behaviour in offices and it's getting to be a real problem.

"I have seen more aggression and emotional outbursts in recent years, especially during the appraisal period or when an employee is being pulled up for indiscipline. This behaviour is often the outcome of unexpected result or news which may trigger an acute response," says Jappreet Sethi, a well-known HR consultant. Amit Das, chief human resource officer, Reliance Communication, agrees, saying that increasing pressures at work are impacting the entire equation of work-life balance.

Rajiv Burman, who has worked at senior positions in companies like Pepsi Food, Escotel and Tata Teleservices, before starting his own executive search firm, Lighthouse Partners, gives several reasons for additional pressures employees face today. The marketplace is getting highly competitive with technology shifts, keeping employees connected round-the-clock and the pressure to produce good results intensifying in every quarter. "The pressure is



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DEAL WITH IT

- Invite the employee for a meeting, make him or her comfortable, listen to their viewpoint, ask specific questions and arrive at a conclusion

- Let the employee vent and give him or her time to absorb the unexpected news for which he or she was not psychologically ready
- Treat the outburst as venting out or coping mechanism

immense on company leaders to perform, which gets transferred down the line," says Burman.

So, do managers look at this behavioural aspect as a serious offence or do they let it pass and are considerate about it? "Most of the young managers look at emotional outbursts as an offence and lack of maturity. The reality is that this can hap-

pen with anyone who is not psychologically ready for adverse news. At times, some people are able to control this anguish and others cannot," explains Sethi.

Many experts believe that managers who are successful leaders, under whom team attrition is low, take a considerate view, do not take things personally and put himself/herself in the employees'

WHY THEY'RE 'LOSING IT'

- Highly competitive marketplace leads to huge pressures to perform
- To produce good results in every quarter
- Technological shift and spread of internet, mobile phones, means managers are on duty round-the-clock, which does not lead to a healthy work-life balance
- Confidence and feeling of self-worth among employees due to rising opportunities means they tend to overreact under pressure



- L Sarita Devi broke down after a match during the Incheon Asian Games

Hence there needs to be a differentiation between 'misconduct' and 'serious argument'," says Das.

According to Rohit Aggarwal, chief helping officer, Koenig Solutions, an authorised training partner of Microsoft, Adobe, Cisco, Oracle, VMware, Red Hat etc, "In the corporate world, where being professional is synonymous with exercising control over your emotions, such outbursts can also cost an employee his or her job and a tainted image that is hard to restore. A considerate view of such behaviour is taken only in the rarest of rare cases."

The reverse could also help. Corporate experts suggest that a transparent and an engaging conversation can make all the difference. Such a conversation means "listening to understand" and not "listening to respond".

"I don't advise any punitive action in such cases. Rather, companies should first try and understand the background to the emotional outburst and counsel the employee to be more mature," says Burman.

According to Pankaj Bansal, co-founder and CEO, PeopleStrong HR Services, "Companies should accept the fact that they are dealing with humans and not machines. So a certain level of empathy should be shown to employees during an emotional outburst. It is similar to how the emotional outbursts of a child, who lacks the capability to deal with harsh realities, are accepted. However, as that child grows into an adult we train him/her to cope. Corporates should have programmes to make their employees emotionally strong and capable of handling such situations."

ashoes; whilst explaining or reinforcing the do's and don'ts of a professional behaviour: "However, there can be a manager who does not have leadership skills and who might be seriously offended by the employee's behaviour. It also depends on the very act of the employee; the language or tone or expression that is being used or demonstrated by the employee.