

CASE STUDY 6: MUNICIPAL

BACKGROUND + CONTEXT

A facility run by a regional district was experiencing a steady escalation of negative behaviour in the workplace. The facility had under 100 unionized and non-unionized employees and had been operating for more than 25 years. The staff consisted of both long-term employees with a great deal of seniority and younger, less-experienced staff with a high turnover rate.

For years management was aware "people did not know how to communicate with each other." Symptoms included friction between older and younger staff and a general inability to accept change. Management responded by keeping conflicted parties away from each other, intentionally avoiding the underlying issues.

Reports of bullying and one or two incidents of physical contact had occurred.

THE PROACTIVE RESPONSE

ProActive was invited to deliver its **Respectful Workplace Fundamentals™** training. Both Respectful Workplace (RWP) Modules 1 and 2 were applied over a two-day period. Four sessions of each module were rolled-out to all staff over a weekend to ensure employees could attend without disruption to scheduling or operations.

RWP 1 is informational in nature and focuses on creating awareness of workplace issues. RWP 2 provides hard-skills training using ProActive's *Straight Talk*, a model of communication that addresses how to effectively hold difficult conversations. Management's objective was for its staff to leave the sessions being able to handle difficult conversations with poise.

It became clear in the training that people were having difficulty dealing with problem behaviours including nagging, sarcasm, negativity, talking behind backs and even physical bullying. The "unwritten rules" of the facility were allowing a wide range of disrespectful behaviours to take place. People felt they were poorly equipped to address these issues with managers, supervisors, or peers.

Throughout the first two days of training, numerous incidents were discussed relating to the "unwritten rules." Participants learned the importance of taking responsibility for their actions; getting their work done; and rising above problem behaviours. The *Straight Talk* model was discussed and role-played in detail to ensure both managers and staff were comfortable putting it into action.

By the end of the first session, participants had committed to listening more and being more considerate of others; letting unimportant things go; and dealing with problem behaviours. The sessions were positive, energetic and appreciated by the workgroup.



A second round of RWP1 and RWP2 training was scheduled four months later for new employees and those who missed the first sessions. The management team then participated in a Facilitated Dialogue for Solutions session—a structured decision-making process—to develop strategies for continuing improvement. In the end a clear action plan was created and individuals were assigned specific tasks to complete within set time frames.

THE RESULT

Two months after the first training sessions, the manager of the facility noted *Straight Talk* was being used daily:

"It is incredible and unbelievable how well it is working. People, who in the past would not even look at each other, are now using Straight Talk and working out their differences in a professional manner."

Nearly a year later positive change is evident. Managers and staff have jointly created a Respectful Workplace Committee as a result of the Dialogue for Solutions session. Managers are also better equipped to ensure written rules are followed, and difficult conversations are being held constructively. Individuals now understand how one person's poor behaviour is NOT reflective of the organization or its goals. It is a reflection of individual choice, not enterprise philosophy or inaction. The Respectful Workplace program has changed the way staff and managers view their workplace and the overall organization.

PROACTIVE PRODUCTS USED IN THIS CASE

Respectful Workplace Training 1 is an interactive session designed to facilitate the creation and maintenance of safe, healthy and productive workplaces. Organizations and teams learn how to build a workplace free of harmful behaviours. Respectful Workplace 1 is the first step in creating a vibrant, positive workplace.

Respectful Workplace Training 2 is an interactive skills-based session designed to facilitate the development of robust, respectful and professional dialogue in the workplace. Participants learn how to apply a conversational framework called *Straight Talk*. This framework helps us engage with peers during potentially difficult conversations, in a respectful, professional manner.

Dialogue For Solutions (facilitated session) helps groups share information and arrive at decisions effectively. The ProActive facilitator involves all group members and ensures all contributions are heard. It is particularly useful for complex or divisive issues. Discussion is clearly focused around gaining members' commitment to create and execute a clearly defined action plan.

