SKILLS FOR RESPONDING TO OTHERS

Warning: The skills in this handout stand in contrast to the things people often do when faced with difficult conversations. As a result, some of them may not feel "natural" - at first. As is true with any skills, developing them takes practice!

About this Handout: There are eight skills presented in this handout. The skills include a definition, examples, and a description of when you might use these skills is presented. The "when you might use this skill" section is included because all of the skills are not equally appropriate for every situation.

Safety First: Those who are most effective at managing conflict have learned communication skills that make it as safe as possible for everyone involved to talk honestly about the issues – especially when strong feelings are involved. Effective use of these skills tends to minimize defensiveness and this makes it safe enough to talk. They also help preserve relationships, which are sometimes a casualty of conflict…

Active Listening

As a leader you are in a position to field complaints from one employee about another. How (and how well) you understand what you are told will affect how you respond and what, if anything, you decide to do next. In order to understand you probably need to listen. Really effective listening is often called Active Listening.

Instead of using Active Listening many people:

- react defensively ("You're the one being unfair here!")
- debate ("You're wrong!")
- blame the other person for misunderstanding them ("You're jumping to conclusions!")
- make judgments – even privately - about what the person is saying (e.g., "What a jerk!")
- think of their response while the other person is speaking ("I'm going to tell him x, y, and z just as soon as he shuts up . . .")
- interrupt while the other person is talking ("Now just a minute!")

Active Listening is a two-part process: 1) hearing what the other is saying and 2) demonstrating to her/him that s/he has been heard. Active Listening can be used to:

- help our *understanding* of the speaker's point of view and/or concerns
- de-escalate intense emotions
- convey respect
- convey safety
- encourage honest sharing of the speaker's perspective

Four skills effectively demonstrate Active Listening:

- Attending Behaviors
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing
- Reflecting Feelings

Attending Behaviors

These are behaviors that convey to another person that you are listening and following what s/he is saying, as well as that you are open to hearing and sincerely want to understand.

Such behaviors include:

- Attentive silence
- making direct but relaxed eye contact;
- reinforcing the eye contact by focusing your body toward the person talking and, if you are seated, leaning slightly toward him/her;
- nodding or using other subtle nonverbal communications; and
- occasionally saying a word or making a sound that assures the other you are following, such as “uh huh."

Avoid other non-verbal behaviors that might undermine the above message, such as crossing your arms, furrowing your brow, etc., which the speaker could interpret as critical judgment on your part.

(Note: nonverbal communication can vary across cultures, e.g. appropriateness and length of eye contact or acceptable physical proximity when talking).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is simply saying back to the speaker in your own words what you heard her/him say right after s/he says it.

Paraphrasing serves two important functions:

- It highlights what you do and do not understand – immediately.
- It is one of the best ways of demonstrating to the other person that you have heard and understood them.

How to Start . . .

For paraphrasing to sound and feel natural, you will need some way to start. The following are a few possible ways to start a paraphrase:

- "If I understand you correctly…"
- "What concerns you most is…"
- "So, you're saying that…"
- "It sounds as if . . . "
- "So, from your point of view . . . "
- "It sounds like you feel . . . "
- "So, it seems to you that . . . "
- "As you see it . . . "

(Thanks to Francine Montemurro of the Boston University Ombuds Office for the above examples.)

Summarizing

Sometimes a speaker has a lot to say. Interrupting them – even to paraphrase – can be annoying to them. Summarizing is just like paraphrasing except it requires you track and restate the general themes or main points someone has made over a longer period of time. Example:

> "If I understand what you're saying, it bothers you when Joanie does X, Y, and Z and this has been going on for a number of months. Also, when you tried to talk to her about your concerns she got angry with you and left the office." Do I have it right?"

Reflecting Feelings

Sometimes the emotional content of what someone says is the most important detail in her or his story. Reflecting feelings requires that you listen for feelings expressed by a speaker and identify them – whether they were expressed verbally or non-verbally - without expressing your judgment, opinions, etc.

Experts in emotional intelligence say there are four families of feelings: mad, sad, glad, and scared. Most likely, as a leader fielding complaints, those approaching you will feel mad, sad, and/or scared (or any of a hundred variations of these).

Examples:

- "It sounds like you are disappointed (or hurt) that she didn't return your calls."
- "So you're angry that she didn't get the information to you when you were expecting it. Do I have it right?
- "It made you mad that the group decided without even asking you about it. Do I have that right?"
- "It sounds like you were really scared when he came into the office and slammed the door."

When might you use Active Listening?

1) … when you are in the role of Complaint Receiver, Investigator, Coach, Mediator, or Facilitator

2) … when you don't understand:

    a. what the other person is saying or
    b. why s/he is saying it

3) … when you want to avoid - or derail - a debate

4) … when you want to slow down the pace of a conversation – especially when emotions are escalating

5) … when you want to verify the accuracy of your perceptions and understanding of what the other person thinks, feels, etc.

6) … when you want the speaker to know that you understand her/his perspective

If you use a feeling word, it's better to <u>overstate</u> the intensity (e.g., "furious") rather than understate it ("concerned") because:

- s/he will tell you quickly if the intensity of what s/he feels is less than you stated and

- understating it will convey you don't get it and it might escalate her or his emotion.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-Ended questions in combination with Active Listening Skills gives you the best chance of gathering the most important information you will need from others when you are fielding complaints. Open-Ended questions cannot be answered in a yes/no or finite manner. They usually start with "what" or "how." Although Closed Questions can often be useful to get quick clarifying information, Open-Ended Questions often yield a lot more useful information. They encourage a speaker to elaborate on her/his concerns, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, etc. and to provide information s/he feels is most relevant.

Open-Ended questions often begin with *how* or *what* and sometimes *why*. Although most invite an answer to the question "why," asking "why" directly can sometimes lead a person to think s/he has to defend her or himself; as though s/he has been accused of doing something wrong (e.g., "Why did you do that?") – even if that wasn't your intention.

Examples:

- How do you see it?
- What did she say to you?
- How did that affect you?
- What were hoping would happen when you said that to her?
- What would you like to see happen now?

And some Open-Ended Questions are "Door Openers" such as, "And then what happened?"

Finally, some requests serve as de-facto Open-Ended Questions. For example, you might say, "Tell me more" as an alternative way to ask, "And then what happened?"

Note: Your tone of voice really matters. Open-Ended Questions can be misused in an accusatory manner – especially when combined with angry or accusatory non-verbal communication. For example, "What the hell are you people doing over there?" or "How did you become so paranoid?" - while, technically, Open-Ended Question, are judgmental and accusatory in tone and form. It's likely to lead to defensiveness.

When Might you use Open-Ended Questions?

1) …when you are in the roles of Complaint Receiver, Investigator, Coach, Mediator, or Facilitator … when you are confused* about what the other person is saying, what s/he means, or how s/he arrived at a particular conclusion

2) … when you think you understand what s/he is saying but don't understand why s/he is saying it

3) … when all you understand is that someone is upset - but you don't understand why

4) … when you want to understand the facts of a situation but do not fully understand the impact (or 'back story") affecting the other person

5) … when you don't like what the other person is saying about you or someone else and would like to defend yourself or that other person

* This requires being honest with yourself about what you know and do not know about what someone else means, etc. It helps to remain genuinely curious – while avoiding the temptation to assume too quickly that your assumptions are completely accurate.

PRACTICE EXERCISE (part 1): One Speaker and one Listener for three minutes.

Speaker: Tell your partner about: 1) something that: a) a direct report did that bothered or offended you OR 2) something that happened outside of work that you thought was really unfair. Explain as much as you can about why you feel the way you do for three minutes.

Listener: In response to what the Speaker tells you, just practice Active Listening skills, and/or Open-Ended Questions in listening to the speaker complain. Don't give advice, agree, disagree, or tell a story of your own. Try to understand as much as you can about the other person's perspective, concerns, feelings, etc.

CASE PRACTICE (part 2): This time the one who listened in part 1 will read and play the role of the employee in the "Enough is Enough" case.

Listeners: Remember your three goals:

- Gather facts about complainant's perspective,
- Find out about complainant's expectations of you, and
- Decide and communicate about next steps you will take.

SKILLS FOR INITIATING DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHERS

Note: Like the skills above, the following skills are designed to help you to talk about what you need to while making potentially difficult conversations as safe as possible. This, of course, is especially important when dealing with your direct reports.

To be effective, you will need to talk about your concerns in a way that allows the other person to hear them (i.e., in a way that does not elicit much or, ideally, any defensiveness). Although you cannot control how someone else thinks, feels, or acts, using the skills of Framing, I Language, Describing "Gaps," Limit-Setting, and Using Consequences can affect her or his perceptions of safety – and may influence her or his openness to discussing and/or resolving the topic with you in a way that works for both of you.

Framing

If you decide to investigate a complaint made by one employee against another, it is because you have concerns about what you initially heard (while serving as Complaint Receiver). You will need to contact her/him and say something about the reason for the contact and say that you would like to discuss it and get her/his perspective about it. A skill called Framing allows you to describe what you want to discuss.

The following are among the least effective ways to start a difficult conversation:

- Insults (e.g., You are so arrogant!)
- Accusations (e.g., You are lying!)
- Threats (e.g., You're going to be sorry for what you did!)
- Stating negative assumptions (e.g., You're trying to undermine our team!)
- Making judgments or conclusions (e.g., You don't care about anyone else!)
- Expressing negative feelings about the person (e.g., I am furious with you!)

To avoid eliciting defensiveness, it helps to use:

- facts (rather than judgments, opinions, or assumptions)
- neutral (rather than value-laden) language and
- goals which appear legitimate to both (or all) parties

	Instead of this…	**Try this . . .**
Specific Facts	You are constantly undermining him! Your use of email is unacceptable.	At the meeting yesterday you told Joe he was "out of touch" and I saw you roll your eyes when he began to speak. Yesterday you cc'd the email to Betty to the entire department. In it you called her an idiot and accused her of bigotry.
Neutral Language	Your priorities are off-base. You weren't listening when I explained your responsibilities.	I think you and Joe may have different priorities. I'm not sure you and Joe have the same *understanding* about your responsibilities.
Goals	You need to stop interrupting people when they're talking. That's just rude! Stop trying to undermine our team.	I'd like everyone to feel respected – especially when they disagree. I'd like us to agree on what's okay and not okay as we try to complete this project by the deadline.

Starting with specific facts AND, following with an Open-Ended Question or using *I Language* (more on this later) is usually a good way to begin a conversation. Facts are less controversial and, therefore, less likely to elicit fear, anger, or resistance - and inhibit

the other person's ability to listen to you. Similarly, using neutral language or identifying goals that matter to both people is often helpful. This approach gives you a greater chance of talking constructively and finding mutually agreeable (win-win) solutions.

Framing can help separate the *naming* of the sources of disagreements from judgments about who is right or wrong. Neutral framing helps people discuss their differences respectfully so that *how* they discuss them does not become another source of (i.e., add unnecessarily to the complexity of) conflict.

Examples:

1) "It sounds like you *disagree* about . . .

    - . . . which of you is responsible for writing the committee report."
    - . . . what constitutes 'appropriate collegial behavior' in this situation."
    - . . . your expectations of one another on this project."

2) "You seem to have a *different understanding of* . . .

    - your responsibilities."
    - the criteria for making assignments."
    - her motivation for making this request

3) "It sounds like you and she *perceived* what happened *differently*."

4) "Your *recollections* about these events seem to *differ*."

5) "You seem to have *different beliefs* about . . .

Use "Given that . . ."

If you believe a direct report has not recognized all of her or his options when reflecting upon a particular action decision, the phrase "given that" combined with an Open-Ended Question may help you focus (frame) the issue and engage her/him in considering it more deeply (e.g., "Given that you were angry when he said that, what do you think you might have done differently to have avoided scaring Joe?").

Notes about Framing:

1. It is often helpful to frame goals as "how to" statements with an action verb and the desired results. For example: "This work involves a great deal of controversial content. It's important to me that you (staff) are able to express yourselves and hear a variety of views. But I also want it to be safe to discuss these views. So, how can we promote the free expression of ideas AND make it safe to do so?"

2. Even if the issue(s) you want to discuss involve things that happened in the past, any agreements you reach to resolve the issue(s) – even agreements about the repair of past harms - will be *implemented* in the future. That's where you're trying to go in making agreements.

3. Depending on the number and complexity of issues to negotiate it may be useful to write them down on a flip chart or pad.

4. Framing is simply talking about the situation, naming concerns, or identifying goals in a way that's likely to make it safe to have the discussion and solve problems – and minimize the chances of getting locked into a debate.

When Might you Use the Skill of Framing?

1) When you approach someone to describe your purpose in talking with her/him in the Investigator role.

2) If you are tempted to speak in generalities (e.g., "You always . . ." or "You never . . . ") use Framing with specific facts instead ("Last Tuesday in our staff meeting you said x").

3) If you have made a strong negative judgment about the correctness of the other person's conclusions use neutral language instead (e.g., "I think we see this situation differently").

4) If you believe the other person's goals conflict with yours use objective criteria rather than demanding what you want by using authority (e.g., "Let's see if we can at least agree on some criteria to use or someone to whom we can turn to help us with this.").

Practice Framing*:*

One of your direct reports (Biff) has complained to you that another (Charlene) has a pattern of blaming her mistakes on others (including him). The last time this happened, Biff admitted to you that he "blew up" at her and "called her on it." He told her, "You're always blaming other for your own failures. Why don't you grow up take some responsibility for your own mistakes?" Needless to say, Charlene did not respond well to this "suggestion." Even though you understand Biff felt defensive, you do not consider his response appropriate. Use the space below to write how you would frame this issue with Biff in a way that will help him to reflect on his own actions. (Hint: Try to say what concerns you about Biff's actions in a way he will be able to hear.)

I Language

"I Language" (also called "I Statements" or "I Messages") allows one to talk about her/his own concerns, feelings, etc. about a problem without blaming, judging, or accusing another person, which usually takes the form of "You Language" (or "You Statements"). This assertive communication tool allows the speaker to take responsibility for her/his own feelings, concerns, etc. rather than implying that another person caused them. Look at the following contrasting options for how a supervisor might express the same idea . . .

Examples of "You Statements"	Examples of "I Statements"
"You're just too sensitive about race."	"Sally, I'd really like to understand what leads you to believe what Jane said was because of your race."
"You obviously don't understand the assignment!"	"I'd like to understand what both of you thought the assignment involved."
"You offended me!"	"I feel offended."
"That's not what you said a few minutes ago!"	"I'm confused. Earlier I thought you said you didn't hear their conversation but now it's sounding like you did. What am I missing?"

Note: Watch out for "You Statements" disguised as "I Statements." For example, "I think you are a liar" is NOT an "I Statement" even though it starts with the word "I." It is a judgment, which is almost guaranteed to elicit defensiveness – even from actual liars!

When might you use the skill of I Language?

1) … While playing virtually any conflict-related role when you have some personal reaction to what another person said or did (e.g., As a Rule Enforcer, you might say, "I'm concerned about how this is affecting our staff.")

2) … When another person has said or done something you don't like or find offensive and you catch yourself about to use "You Language!"

Practice Writing in I Language*:*

Think about something that bothers you about how one of your direct reports interacted with a colleague. Use the space below to write what you would say using I Language to convey your concern.

Contrasting

According to the authors of Crucial Conversations, Contrasting is simply a pair of statements; the first one describes what you don't want and the second on is a statement about what you do want. If you suspect the direct report with whom you want to hold a "crucial confrontation" might react defensively, prior to discussing the issue, you might find it helpful to use the skill of "Contrasting." Or if, while you are attempting to hold a "crucial confrontation" with a direct report, s/he appears to feel unsafe (i.e., angry or fearful), step out of the conversation and use the skill of "Contrasting."

Example:

"Bob, I don't want you to think I don't appreciate all the great work you've done because I certainly do. I do want to share a concern I have about how you spoke to Beth when you disagreed with her in our staff meeting."

"Jill, it isn't that I want to deny your right of free speech. That's obviously very important. I know you feel passionately about your political views. But I do want to talk with you about some concerns I have about two recent conversations I've heard about with your colleagues."

When might you use the skill of Contrasting?

1) Use Contrasting while playing the Rule Enforcer Role (see examples above).

2) Contrasting is likely to be helpful to you any time someone to whom you are speaking seems to misinterpret your intentions – or even to prevent their misinterpreting your intentions.

3) Related to #2 above, any time someone accuses you of having "bad intentions" might be a good time to use Contrasting (unless the accusation is correct!).

Practice Contrasting*:*

Freddy, one of your direct reports, accused you of taking sides with Joanne against him. Work with a partner to come up with a way to use the skill of Contrasting to respond to this accusation. Write what you would say in the space below.

Describe the Gap

The authors of Crucial Confrontations (Patterson, et al) suggest that when others break promises, act badly, or violate your expectations, it is often useful to describe the gap between what was expected or agreed to and what happened (or didn't). Doing this consists of four parts. You have to make it safe to talk about this by:

a. starting with the facts about what was agreed to or expected (see above);

b. describing what actually happened or didn't;

c. asking an open-ended question (e.g., "what happened" or "can we talk about this?"); and

d. listening to the reply the other person makes in response to your question.

The authors suggest using this tool is to diagnose whether you are facing:

1. An ability gap (e.g., "Only Joe can give permission for me to use that software and he was away on vacation");

2. An attitude problem (e.g., "I have a lot of other more important things to do and decided I'll get to it when I get to it") ;

3. Both (e.g., "I've never felt comfortable using PeopleSoft and, to tell you the truth, I think it's a pain in the rear! It takes forever and is constantly changing.")

Example:

Part 1: We agreed that if any problems arose that might prevent us from reaching our deadlines we would communicate with one another.

Part 2: Jane was expecting to get your order by noon on Wednesday. When she hadn't heard from you by the end of the day Thursday she told me she called you - but you didn't answer.

Part 3: What happened?"

Notes: Sometimes – if you're in crisis situation because of someone's failure to keep a promise, etc., finding out the answer to "what happened" is less crucial than solving the immediate problem. If the circumstance you are facing occurred because someone else did not keep a promise, violated your expectations, or otherwise acted badly creates a crisis for you (e.g., you believe you have to make a decision or take some action immediately because of it), you may, of course, need to simply make the decision or take action – and then use this skill later to discuss the matter with the individual.

Note: Asking "what happened" is not intended to suggest that any explanation (or excuse) whatsoever will be acceptable to you. It is a genuine recognition that something might have prevented another person from keeping his/her word or acting appropriately. But if the answer provided is "I didn't feel like it," it's unlikely you will find that acceptable.

Example: When we started collaborating on this grant we agreed that if any problems arose that might prevent us from reaching important deadlines we would communicate with one another. I was expecting to get your summary of the data by noon on Wednesday. When I

hadn't heard from you by the end of the day Thursday I called you - but you didn't answer. It's now Monday. What happened?

When might you use the skill called Describe the Gap?

1) This skill is especially helpful when you are playing the Rule Enforcer role.

2) Use this skill only AFTER witnessing or investigating, i.e., when you know that a promise has been broken, your expectations have been violated, or someone has behaved badly.

Practice - Describe the Gap

You have heard from Susan and several other people about George's bullying of Susan. George is Susan's supervisor and you supervise George. You have had one conversation with George in which he acknowledged he and Susan had had a "conflict" but he characterized his actions as "simply trying to hold her accountable and get her attention." But he agreed he would always make sure he spoke to her in an appropriate manner in the future.

As you approached George's open office door you could hear him screaming at Susan. In your view, his behavior was inappropriate, regardless of the correctness of what he might have been saying to her. You stopped, knocked on the door, said "excuse me" to Susan, and asked George if he had a minute to talk. Describe what you would say in the space below and, following the formula outlined below, use the skill called Describe the Gap to talk to George.

1. (facts and expectations):

2. (what was observed that was different from #1):

3. (a question):

4. Listen!

Limit-Setting

Limit-Setting can be used to communicate what is and is not acceptable to you in your role as a leader. It allows you to establish boundaries and expectations if you are concerned about what others are requesting or expecting from you or if you don't like what they doing, not doing, or planning to do. This skill is intended to help avoid misunderstandings. It can also help you to decline requests you believe are inappropriate or when other considerations have priority.

Examples:

"Dennis, I understand you may need to say you disagree with your colleagues when you do. But it's at least as important to me that everyone feel respected and safe in the workplace. Raising your voice, name-calling, or making threats is not okay."

"Pat, you asked me to take disciplinary action toward Kerry. After talking with both of you and also with several people who were present when the incident occurred, I have determined that, under the circumstances, her actions toward you were appropriate. I will not be taking disciplinary action against Kerry."

Note: Limit-setting is enhanced by verifying: a) whether the employee hears and understands your expectations (i.e., "What did you hear me say?" or "What do you understand about what I am telling you?") and b) whether s/he agrees to comply with these expectations in the future. Does s/he recognize your concerns? Does s/he agree to change? If you don't know, find out by asking about these things!

When might you use Limit-Setting?

1) … when you are in the Rule Enforcer role (i.e., if someone has taken – or is about to take – actions that violates your own expectations, departmental or university rules, or state or federal law) to communicate that this behavior is not acceptable

2) … when you can tell that someone is making different assumptions or has expectations from you – and not addressing this will lead to disappointment and/or misunderstandings

3) … when someone is asking you to do something you feel is wrong or inappropriate

Practice Limit-Setting

Instructions: Choose a partner. Read the following case study involving a complaint made by a trusted long-term employee (Stan) about a new employee (Betsy).

Stan has worked in his current staff position for 10 years. He and four colleagues were all very excited when Betsy was hired. Although none of them knew her very well when she started, they had all been favorably impressed with her work in another department. And her interview went great, too. Unfortunately, trouble started almost from the beginning . . .

Stan, Betsy, and four other employees work in one large room in a "customer service" role. Almost all of their work is with customers over the telephone. They often overhear one another and, over the years, this has been a blessing. Often one of them knows information the others don't and they have developed the habit of telling each other when they hear one of their colleagues start to give incorrect information. And sometimes they

will put customers on hold just long enough to ask one another questions, get good information, etc.

Like any new employee, it was expected Betsy would spend a few weeks in "learning" mode and start taking calls on her own slowly. But, to everyone's surprise, Betsy started taking calls only a few days after starting and she seemed very confident in her new role. On a few occasions Stan heard her give incorrect information about small things. After she got off the phone he tried to give her the correct information for future reference. He was shocked that she actually argued with him and insisted he had heard wrong.

Before the end of the first week, Stan heard Betsy starting to give a customer some misinformation that was pretty important. He simply could not let this go. He left his seat and walked over to signal her about the mistake. She apologized to the caller and asked if she could put her on hold for a moment. After which, she said, "What the hell are you doing interrupting me? I know what I'm doing. I did this kind of work for 15 years before I came here so I sure don't need your help! Get back in your seat and leave me alone!" This hostility was totally uncalled for. All Stan was trying to do was help. And, Betsy STILL insisted that her wrong information was right.

Stan decide it's time to talk to you (the supervisor) so he walked into your office and asked to talk. Betsy was glaring at him as he closed the office door. After hearing this from Stan you approach Betsy. She insisted Stan had misunderstood what she had told the caller. Further, she insisted Stan owed her an apology for his "interruption and rudeness." And she even questioned you for "automatically supporting Stan." You decide to use Limit-Setting with Betty. Write in the space below what you would say.

Use Consequences

Using "Consequences" means telling the other person what you will do if her/his behavior does not change. (Note: This is different from actually imposing a consequence after someone has failed to change her or his behavior.) To do this, identify an action the other person would not want you to take and tell her/him that you will take this action if the behavior does not change. It always contains an "if . . . then" clause. In many situations it does not require formal authority.

Examples:

(Colleague to Colleague) "Chris, I don't want to date you. If you continue to ask me out I will speak to our Chair about it."

(Chair to Staff Member) "William, we've discussed this before. Spreading rumors about your colleagues is hurtful to them, disruptive to the work environment, and unacceptable to me. If this happens again, I will give you a written Corrective Action."

When might you use Consequences?

1) … when you are in the Rule Enforcer role and you want someone to change her/his behavior or avoid taking action s/he is considering;

2) … when nothing else you have tried has worked;

3) … you have the ability to do what you say you will do; and

4) … when the consequence you will use is something the other person would like to avoid

Notes:

This should be appropriate for addressing the problem (i.e., not killing a fly with an atom bomb!)

Use this skill judiciously.

IF you issue a consequence (threat), and the behavior occurs, unless you have an exceptionally good reason not to, it's very important to do what you said you would do. Keep your promise; otherwise, you will lose credibility.

Practice – Use Consequences

(Same scenario as in example for Describe the Gap only this time work with a partner): You have heard from Susan and several other people about George's bullying of Susan. You have had one conversation with George in which he acknowledged they had had a conflict but he characterized his actions as "simply trying to hold her accountable and get her attention."

As you approached George's open office door you could hear him screaming at Susan. In your view, his behavior was inappropriate, regardless of the correctness of what he might have been saying to her. You stopped, knocked on the door, said "excuse me" to Susan, and asked George if he had a minute to talk. Write what you would say in the space below and use Consequences in your discussion with George.