



UNTAPPED TALENT

B2B GUIDE TO INNOVATIVE HIRING AND RETENTION

DE-ESCALATION AND CRISIS INTERVENTION

Sometimes we encounter customers or colleagues in the workplace who become angry or experience a mental health crisis that requires us to respond in an empathetic, calm and effective manner in order to diffuse the situation. We may not *feel* calm in these situations but by preparing ourselves for these possibilities, we can *act* calm.

Safety within your workplace, both physical and psychological, should be a top priority. Therefore, it is important to be able to respond appropriately to de-escalate the situation quickly, ensure that everyone is safe, and effectively support your employee or customer.

People may express anger or fear in a variety of ways. While some may withdraw, others could become aggressive, loud, use obscenities or make insulting remarks or act threatening in a verbal or physical manner. Those who experience a mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, addiction, among others, may experience psychosis.

What is Psychosis?

Psychosis is a mental health disorder in which a person has lost some contact with reality. The person experiencing psychosis may have disturbances in their thinking, emotions and behaviors. Examples of this are hallucinations or delusions.

De-escalation Tips and Tools to Help You Respond Effectively and Foster a Safe Workplace

Be prepared by working out a safety plan with your employees so that everyone knows in advance how to respond to an escalated situation, if you need it. Before you or an employee attempts to de-escalate a situation, assess the situation and decide how to proceed or who to call.

- **Speak Calmly and Respectfully** People tend to match each other's volume, pace, and tone in conversation. Speaking calmly and at a normal pace can encourage the person to lower their voice. Avoid using sarcasm or humor which can exacerbate the situation. Use clear language.
- **Control Your Body Language** Use non-threatening body language. Avoid touching the person or sudden movement.

- **Listen** When the person believes that you have not listened to them, they will likely remain agitated. It's important to give a person going through a crisis a safe space to express themselves and let them know they're being heard. Repeat back what they say to ensure that you understand them.
- **Acknowledge and Accept their Emotions** Acknowledge and accept the person's feelings without passing judgement on them. If the person is experiencing psychosis, do not challenge or disagree with them. They believe themselves and their experience to be right and true.
- **Apologize for Your Contribution** Sometimes conflicts are the result of more than one person. If there is something that you or your organization has done to contribute to the situation, accept responsibility and apologize for it.
- **Never say, "I understand what you're going through."** Every person is unique and saying that you understand their experience can make that person feel patronized. Instead say, "I see that this is difficult for you." It is more effective to simply acknowledge their words and emotions.
- **Contact Your Crisis Response Team** within your organization if the situation is urgent but does not require emergency attention. This could be members of the management team as well as an employee trained in mental health first aid and should be planned for in advance and part of fostering a psychologically safe workplace.
- **Know When to Disengage** In a situation with someone who is angry or upset, there may come a point when you need to disengage from the situation. You may decide to do this to stay safe or because it is unlikely that there will be a positive resolution. If the situation is with a customer you might say, "I am sorry that you feel that way. Unfortunately, there is nothing more that we can do." If it's an employee, you might say, "Let's talk about this when we are both calm."
- **Call 911** if there is a danger of harm to self, others or property, recognizing your safety and the safety of your employees is a top priority.

Always keep in mind that merchandise and property can be replaced, but people cannot.