

8

Counselling style

Counselling is a skill which a manager can use to help other people resolve their own problems. Use this exercise to identify how you respond when people come to you with problems or issues.

Assess your counselling style

Below are five different situations which you may face as a manager. Imagine that one of your team has come to you with an issue. For each situation choose the response you are most likely to make. Tick this statement.

There are no right or wrong answers.

Situation A

'When I took on the job I was told that people could be flexible with their hours. It's not easy having to work overtime because I have to pick up the kids. I can't always rely on my childminder to work overtime too.'

Choose the response you are most likely to make:

- 1 Tell me what arrangements you have with your childminder. Does she work only certain hours?
- 2 As you have children, you are responsible for collecting them at certain times so it's not easy to stay late, is that what you're saying?
- 3 You must feel pulled in two directions. Perhaps you've not made it clear that you have to leave on time because of your commitments?
- 4 It sounds really difficult to manage. There must be other ways round this. Why not change your childminder or join an after-school club?
- 5 Well, I'll see what I can do to help. Perhaps Petra from the other section could take on some of your work. Do you want to me to ask her?

Situation B

'I've now had a chance during my traineeship to see all of the departments in the company. I've decided that I'm not happy in the work I'm doing. I don't think I'm suited for this kind of job. I'd far rather start again in an area which will give me more job satisfaction.'

Choose the response you are most likely to make:

- 1 So you feel you'd be a lot happier if you could start out afresh in a new area, is that it?
- 2 Whether this is the right job for you, who can say, but it's good you've come to a decision.
- 3 Are you sure you are making the right decision? It seems a pity to waste the time you've already spent in the business.
- 4 So you've decided you'd be better off to leave?
- 5 How much have you looked into other possible areas of work?

Situation C

'Well, I really thought that I had the job in the bag. It's just not on. I'm far better qualified than him and I've been with the company a longer time. If he thinks he can come in here and tell me what to do, he's another think coming.'

Choose the response you are most likely to make:

- 1 So you feel you're much better than him and you wouldn't like it if he were your boss?
- 2 Well, you may be better qualified, but do you think the head of department would have chosen him if he didn't seem right?
- 3 Yes, that will be very difficult. When is he likely to take on the job?
- 4 So you really don't want to work for him?
- 5 Hold on, don't jump the gun. Why do you think that he will tell you what to do?

Situation D

'I don't know if I can take any more. I've had angry customers on the phone ranting and raving that they haven't received their goods. The people in the transport department don't help. The don't even answer their phones. It's all right for them, they don't have to deal with members of the public.'

Choose the response you are most likely to make:

- 1 It's no use blaming another department. It's part of your job to deal with customer concerns. It's something you just have to get used to.
- 2 I know it's not easy, but you get used to dealing with angry people after a while. It will seem much better tomorrow.
- 3 So what exactly is the problem customers are experiencing?
- 4 Maybe transport are so snowed under with work they can't answer their phones.
- 5 So it seems as though everyone has been giving you a hard time today and it's difficult to take.

Situation E

'I know it's no use. Whatever I say he's not going to believe me because I'm not his blue-eyed boy. He's already told the others that my productivity is down. Just because I'm less experienced than them doesn't mean I can't do as good a job.'

Choose the response you are most likely to make:

- 1 You're getting this out of proportion. Could it be because you feel you were passed over for promotion?
- 2 I know, he can be a pain sometimes. If I were you, I wouldn't take any notice of it.
- 3 What else has happened in the past to suggest he doesn't like you?
- 4 If I understand you correctly, you feel he won't take your word about it and that he's trying to undermine your confidence.
- 5 It isn't fair. You should let his manager know about this. I'll come with you if you like.

Interpretation of your counselling style

This assessment is based on the work of Carl Rogers. He identified five categories of response:

- E Evaluative responses – making judgements. This response is used most often.
- I Interpretive responses – making hunches, reading between the lines. This response is used next often.
- S Supportive responses – offering help, backing and solutions. This is normally used third most often.
- P Probing responses – questioning, asking for more information. This is used fourth most often.
- U Understanding responses – non-evaluative, reflecting back to the speaker what he/she has said. This response is used least often.

Managers who use a counselling style most often adopt understanding responses – U. This is because counselling involves listening to people in a non-judgmental way and helping them to resolve their own problems. It is most likely to happen by using understanding responses.

How to score

Look at the response selected for each situation and note which category it falls under.

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Response No.</i>				
	1	2	3	4	5
A	P	U	I	E	S
B	I	S	E	U	P
C	U	E	S	I	P
D	E	S	P	I	U
E	I	E	P	U	S

We tend to have fixed ways of responding, therefore we over-use some categories and under-use others.

- Which categories do you use most?
- Which categories do you use least?
- What do you have to do more of/less of to become a better counsellor?

RECOMMENDED READING

MacLennan, Nigel (1996) *Counselling for Managers*, Gower, Aldershot
 Redman, Warren (1995) *Counselling Your Staff*, Kogan Page, London