



## Seven Steps to a Drama-Free Office

If you work with other people (and who doesn't?), reflect on the last week and how much time you wasted in drama – the energy-draining behaviors or exchanges that keep you from what you want to be doing. Think about all the infighting, meaningless meetings, turf wars, pouting and other behaviors that blocked positive, productive interactions in your organization.

Now, think about how many things you could have completed, or how much time you could have had brainstorming new ideas if you had that time and energy back.

By following these seven steps, you can shift yourself (and your team) away from drama to more enjoyable and productive tasks.

### Step 1: Get Out of Your Own Drama

One of the most difficult challenges for aspiring leaders is to acknowledge their own responsibility for relationship shortcomings. Before you can guide others, you must take inventory of your own interaction strengths and the ways you sabotage relationships. The strength inventory is usually easy. The sabotage inventory is more difficult. It requires the courage to seek others' candid observations and advice about your behavior.

To determine your own drama tendencies, you can use self-reflection, ask your colleagues or take a drama-assessment (<http://www.dramafreeoffice.com/self-assessment-survey/>). You can only help others when you are curious yourself. Take a deep breath, get re-centered and get out of your own way.

### Step 2: Diagnose the Type of Drama

Once you are committed to authenticity and curiosity yourself, you can determine what kind of drama the other person is exhibiting. There are four primary drama roles that emerge most frequently in office settings: complainer, controller, cynic and caretaker. You'll need to use different strategies for different personality types. There is no "one-size-fits-all" antidote.

Notice the kinds of people with whom you're dealing. Will they respond more to direct confrontation and setting boundaries (better for controllers and cynics) or to appreciation and encouragement

(better for caretakers and complainers)? Tailor your approach to maximize your chance for shifting their behavior.

### Step 3: Assess the Risk of Confrontation

Before meeting with drama-prone colleagues, identify and evaluate the potential downside of a confrontation. Without objectively assessing these risks, you might be tempted to either accept a dysfunctional relationship that you could have salvaged or make a misstep you could have avoided. Before launching into a direct conversation with your boss or a team member, consider the possible side effects (e.g., nothing happens, the relationship worsens, they abruptly leave) and whether you're willing to face them.

### Step 4: Develop Rapport with the "Drama-Prone"

It's important to establish rapport with the other person so he or she is best prepared to receive your message. Try opening with a blend of connection, appreciation, ground rules and expectations. Your goal is to get the person's full attention and to prepare him or her to be receptive to your ideas. People prefer to collaborate with those they know and like, so this step is powerful in setting the tone for the rest of the conversation.

### Step 5: Have a Direct Conversation

While an entire article could be written about direct conversations, stay dispassionate and state "the facts" when confronting a person about their drama. In addition, present the meaning that you derived from the facts (i.e., your perceptions) and any emotions you experienced from those facts.

This next part is a little tougher. Share with the person how *you* contributed to the situation (why it's also your fault). Then end with a specific request. Usually these conversations end with an agreement about what will happen next to make sure the drama ends.

While this may sound simple, these steps are worth practicing and mastering so that your entire conversation flows smoothly. For instance, it's very easy to mix facts and derived meaning. People often say, "The facts are, you are being difficult" when, in fact, the level of a per-

son's cooperation or difficulty is derived meaning or perception. One person may consider challenging an idea as difficult behavior and another might appreciate it as a commitment to improvement.

### Step 6: Get Their Commitment

The last step of the direct conversation in Step 5 is your specific request or expectations of the person. A commitment to realize these expectations without excuses, sarcasm, self-pity or martyrdom is often difficult to obtain from drama-prone people. They'll dance around the expectation or rephrase them in vague terms. These deflection or evasion tactics are self-protection mechanisms that help the dramatic person avoid both change and accountability.

Don't get hooked. Reiterate both your specific expectations and your need for the drama-prone person's commitment to meet them. If he or she continues to resist or deflect, be prepared to calmly lay out an ultimatum, including specific rewards for meeting objectives and consequences for missing objectives.

### Step 7: Validate and Anchor Commitment, New Behavior

Praise the person for his or her positive behavior during your meeting, and honor the commitments the person made. Follow up with a short note or e-mail confirming and affirming the person's commitments. Ideally, you should ask them to summarize your meeting which should include their specific agreements. People generally live up to what they put on paper.

Once you've taken these seven steps, you have done the hard work. Now you can redirect your energy toward the collaborative, meaningful projects that you enjoy doing . . . and work in an office free from drama.

*Kaley Klemp and Jim Warner are the authors of The Drama-Free Office: A Guide to Healthy Collaboration with Your Team, Coworkers and Boss. You can get a free sample of the book on Facebook, or visit [www.DramaFreeOffice.com](http://www.DramaFreeOffice.com).*

