

## What to Do When We Wish We Could Fire Someone

# Confront!

## ...and Invest

by Joyce Strong

**I HAVE OFTEN HEARD IT SAID** that conflict is a blessing—that it uncovers dangerous weaknesses in the ministry—and that resolution brings growth to all involved.

While this is absolutely true, it is no fun having to address a volatile situation! It will take wisdom, patience, and a good deal of time if we are to see someone's life turn around.

### AN ILLUSTRATION

About a year ago, Doug, a friend of mine, began serving as business administrator at a large denominational church, with about ten employees reporting to him. One of these employees was Sue, a woman who delighted in pushing the envelope—coming in late, working at odd times when the building should have been closed, getting involved in operations that she had not been hired to do and wasting time chatting from office to office. Her attitude was that if her authorities gave her a hassle, she would simply walk away from the job and the church. She was not going to have anyone telling her how to do her job! She thought she had everyone over a barrel because she alone had the skill for the work she performed. Besides, she had gotten away with her independence for quite some time. She was a for-

midable woman whom no one had dared cross. Privately, the pastors and the staff wanted Sue to be fired.

After beginning the job, Doug slowly built a relationship with Sue, observing carefully all Sue's activities first hand. Then Doug called Sue into his office and shut the door. He surprised Sue by first complimenting her on the quality of her work, citing specific examples. Doug assured Sue that she was a great asset to the staff, but that there were some matters that concerned him.

This wise administrator then simply and concisely—without judgment or personal comment—listed the unacceptable behaviors. Sue, expecting to be fired, stiffened and began planning her exit.

But she was arrested by Doug's next comment: "I want to work with you. I want to help you become the best employee we have. I want you to have the joy of complete success in this job. But you must know that your past independence cannot continue."

Since Sue had not walked out, Doug took it as a sign to proceed, and outlined a plan. He said that they would take it one day at a time and reevaluate Sue's progress each Friday for one month. If there was improvement, they would continue

working together for another month, with continued regular accountability check-ups during that time. If, at the end of three months Doug felt that they had been successful in turning the situation around, he would love to have Sue stay on in her present position, with an opportunity for a promotion later. If they had not been successful, he would sadly have to let Sue go. It was that simple.

Sue was stunned by how thoroughly Doug had planned out the process and by his evident desire to see her succeed. When Doug began to pray for her, asking God to bless her as she became compliant, there were actually tears in this "tough" lady's eyes. Her heart had been won by someone who cared enough about her to stop her from destroying her future, and was willing to walk with her through to success.

They followed the plan exactly as Doug had prescribed. On Fridays, he evaluated Sue's progress and mentored her, and during the week, he went out of his way to encourage her. Everyone on staff was amazed at the energy and attention to guidelines Sue suddenly brought to her job.

### WHAT HAD DOUG DONE?

1. Encouraged her true strengths
2. Asked permission to share what he saw could be improved

3. Addressed the specific problems at hand in a direct, non-threatening way, as one who cared about her success
4. Asked questions to help her evaluate the problem for herself
5. Designed a course of action that she could clearly understand
6. Prayed with her in closing the session, instilling hope for the future
7. Mentored her and held her accountable in measurable ways

#### WHEN IT DOES NOT WORK

If a staff member resists our efforts and only becomes more troublesome, we will need to return to the line we drew in the sand, which has obviously been crossed. Unfortunately, everyone has a free will, and even the best intervention can be rejected. Sometimes people do not get serious about straightening out until they encounter a stiff penalty for unacceptable behavior. Then, we have done all we can, we need not feel guilty about releasing them from their positions, for the sake of everyone in the ministry.

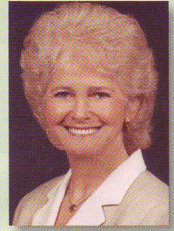
#### Summary

- This article presents an illustration of how staff conflicts can be resolved. Resolution took place because the superior followed the steps below:
  - Encourage strengths
  - Discuss what could be improved
  - Address specific problems in a non-threatening way
  - Ask questions which will help the person evaluate the problem personally
  - Design an easy-to-understand course of action
  - End the session in prayer
  - Mentor and hold the person accountable in measurable ways

- Edicts alone do not bring lasting change of behavior, but investment in their lives will. When these steps do not work, however, releasing the person will be best for the sake of everyone in the ministry.


#### Author

Joyce Strong is an author and international conference speaker focusing on ministry and leadership wholeness. She can be reached at [www.joyce-strongministries.org](http://www.joyce-strongministries.org).



#### INVEST FIRST

People most often rise—or sink—to the level of our expectations. If we want them to rise, we must be ready to provide mentoring and accountability so that their success can be measured and obvious,

especially to them. Edicts alone never bring a lasting change of behavior, but an investment in their lives—carefully planned, within healthy boundaries and measurable—will. 

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