Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #1 - You saw a colleague roll his eyes to another colleague during a presentation you were making to the team.

Intro - Mark, do you have a minute to chat? I appreciate the working relationship we have, so I want to address a concern so that it doesn't negatively affect us.

D - At the staff meeting this morning, while I was making my report, I saw you turn toward Jerry and roll your eyes.

E - I was surprised that you did that, and honestly, I was hurt by it. I felt disrespected.

S - If what I was saying sounded less than brilliant to you [with a smile on your face], I do value your opinion and would be happy to hear what you think. I would appreciate hearing it directly from you. I would ask that you be honest with me, particularly if you don't agree with me, so that I can hear other perspectives and maybe make my presentation better. And if we genuinely disagree on an issue, I would like you to show others that you can share your disagreement openly and honestly in a way that shows you still have respect for me – not by rolling your eyes.

C - Mark, you are good at what you do here, and I value your opinion and our relationship. I want the culture in our team to be a positive, respectful and supportive one for everyone. If we individually show respect for each other, that will continue to build that culture to make this a great supportive environment for all of us. And if we've got a great team, then our performance in this company will stand out and we'll all be successful.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #2 You have received numerous complaints from customers about a particular employee who repeatedly fails to provide the information customers need within a promised timeframe. It requires several phone calls before the employee even returns the customer's call.

Intro - I'd like to talk with you about ways you can improve your customer satisfaction rankings.

D - I have received several phone calls lately from customers you have serviced and there are two recurring issues. The first is that customers are telling me you don't get them information by the date you promised, and the second, that you do not always return their phone calls. Tell me what's happening from your perspective.

E - Customer satisfaction is a high priority for our company and so when I receive calls from your customers who are dissatisfied, it is a concern. It is something that's important to fix. I want to help you do that.

S - Let's work on some strategies for your time management so you can hit the deadlines every time with every customer and return every phone call the same day.

C - I'm sure you will feel better about your work, be less stressed because customers are no longer calling for their information and know that you'll have a higher customer satisfaction rating if you can fix these issues and be consistent. The company will be better satisfied with your performance and so will our clients.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #3 - An employee on your staff has been late to work numerous times or had more absences than is acceptable.

Intro - Hi Joe. I wanted to deal with an issue regarding your time sheets. I want to talk with you to get some information, so it won't be a problem.

D - I noticed on your time sheets that there are three dates when you have been late for work recently.

E - I'm concerned about it because tardiness isn't acceptable, and I am worried that something is wrong. I want to see how I might be able to help.

S - We need you to be here on time. What is happening?
(At this point, it's ideal to gather information and ask questions to encourage the other person to think of options and solutions. Ultimately though, it's up to the employee to find a solution to be at work on time, unless you have the authority to alter the work schedule or flex it in a way that works for the employee's situation.)

If there's no issue, just a lack of attention to being on time, you could continue with:
A requirement of your job is to be here every day on time. We want you to have a long employment here with us. When you are not here on time, it also affects others. It's my responsibility to see that everyone is here when they're supposed to be. Will you commit to being here on time from now on?

C - That's great. I want you and your fellow employees to have a good relationship, and everyone will appreciate it when you are on time. You're a good employee, and I want to keep you. I want you to be happy working here. I am obligated to let you know that if you are late again, I will have to issue you a reprimand – which neither of us wants. Thanks for talking with me.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #4 – Your boss is anxious to get a jump on a project that will gain significant recognition for her and your team, but is shortcutting a number of issues that can potentially cause the project to derail down the road.

Intro - Hi Jane. I have some thoughts about project x that I think are worthwhile talking about asap before we really get started. Can we schedule time this week to talk?

D – At our staff meeting, you introduced project x as a great opportunity for our team to really show what we can do and it is a great opportunity for us and I appreciate your forward thinking about this. You told us that you'd like us to have abc started and projections to you by x date. You also shared that we did not need to go through the Y process and that you thought in order to get a jump on this, we have enough experience to take some educated guesses without actually going through that process.

E - I'm on board to do the project as I think the rest of the team is and I need to share some thoughts about how we approach it. I have some concerns about not going through the full process of Y to give you the projections. Our team does have a lot of experience and has been reliably successful with these projects. One of the key reasons we are successful is that we do the groundwork so that as we build out the project, we don't have unexpected problems and snags or have to backtrack because our projections are off. The groundwork we lay by being thorough in Y process has been a most critical factor in our success. There are an incredible number of variables to account for so even with our experience, without going fully through the process, we are bound to off-base in some of our educated guesses, which WILL then slow us down to adjust for those issues down the road. And, we won't know what to expect or how many different issues could pop up to slow us down. What is most important to me and I'm sure to you, is that if we are taking on this project we are successful. How might it impact you personally and the whole team if we take this on and do not actually deliver with the high level of success this organization is used to from us?

S – I'm proposing that we sit down as a team, look at the project scope, and develop a plan together to figure out what we need to do to deliver this project and if it doesn't fit with the deadline you're looking at, then we will need to get our heads together to get creative about what other resources we can access to help us to make it happen.

C – Jane, you've shown your trust in our skills and success, so if you show us your trust in helping us put the whole plan together, then we're all going to be more confident and on board in making this project a go and deliver it successfully like we are accustomed to doing. We want to look good and we want to make you look good. Let's do this together to make it happen!

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #5 - An employee on your staff is coming to work with body odor, or dirty clothes or has other hygiene issues.

Intro - Hi Jill, I wanted to talk with you about something that can help you here at XYZ Company.

D - On two occasions, other employees on your team have let me know that they've noticed some body odor from your cubicle.

E - This can be a sensitive issue for folks, and I don't know if you're aware that sometimes you have some noticeable body odor. I thought that if you weren't aware, you would want to know. Is this something you're aware of, or something that's maybe a struggle for you?

(At this point, listen, find out what the situation is and help the person think through options for how she might solve the problem – different deodorant, reapplying it during the workday, seeing her doctor, etc.)

S - I want to help make the work environment a pleasant, supportive place for everyone. That's why we also have a fragrance-free zone here, because odors that aren't offensive to one might be to someone else. Since two of your co-workers have talked with me about this, it is an issue that I need you to address.

(What if the person says they don't want to wear deodorant?)

You might suggest that if they choose not to wear deodorant, then they need to find another way to ensure that their body is pleasant smelling – maybe washing in the washroom a couple times a day. It might ultimately be an issue that needs to be referred to Human Resources.

C - If you will address the situation, I, as well as your co-workers, will be appreciative, and it will help us to work better together as a team. I want you to be approachable so you can have a good relationship with your co-workers. Thank you for working on this issue.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #6 - It has been brought to your attention that an employee was overheard sharing personal information about another employee, causing the other employee to be hurt and angry.

Intro – Hi, Susan. Would you please stop in to my office when you have a minute? I want to make you aware of a situation you may want to address.

D - Thanks for coming in, Susan. It has been brought to my attention that yesterday you had a conversation with Jane, and you were overheard saying that Mary is getting ready to file for divorce.

E - I know you are friends with Mary. I don't know your reasons for sharing the information, nor do I need to know, but I am aware that it got back to Mary and she expressed hurt that you shared the information. I do not want or need to be in the middle of the situation. The reason I am bringing it to your attention is twofold – one, I thought you deserved a heads up. Two, when there is gossip in the office environment, it hurts the culture of teamwork and respect for one another.

S - I would ask that in the future, when you are dealing with friendship issues and personal matters that you have those conversations away from the workplace. Also, I hope that you will be proactive in mending the situation with Mary. I do not want to have a rift between the two of you affect our teamwork here in the office. Is there a way that I can be of support to you in thinking through how you might want to approach Mary? It's not my business, but if I can be a sounding board, I'm willing to do that.

C - I appreciate you addressing this situation so that it can be nipped in the bud and the relationships here in the office can move forward in a positive way for everyone.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #7 - A number of employees in a department have approached you for help with a particular employee who is reportedly difficult to deal with for a variety of reasons. (Examples: uncooperative, not sharing information, not meeting deadlines, not cleaning up for the next person, etc.)

INTRO – I want to respond to the concerns you brought to me about Jim.

D - So, I'm hearing you say that Jim is not cooperative in sharing information with you, such as the ABC reports, in time for you to prepare the documents you need to prepare, along with not cleaning up his materials in the common work space.

E - These are problems that don't support teamwork, and I would like to see the issues resolved. It is important for team members to also be able to work through conflicts with each other. If everyone comes to me to resolve all the team conflicts, then that will create a culture where the conflict continues under the surface and folks see each other on the team as tattling to me.

S - I want you to have a conversation with Jim yourself and talk to him about these issues, how it affects you and what you would like from him going forward. I am willing to share a process I learned to script such conversations. Would that be helpful?

C - If you meet with Jim, he will learn that his colleagues have expectations of him and that his behavior affects others. It will work to improve the teamwork and you will have a more honest and open relationship with him going forward. If you do that, and he does not work with you on these issues, then let me know.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #8 - It has come to your attention that an employee has made a serious error affecting quality and safety.

Intro - Melissa, I want to talk with you about a matter that is very serious, and I want to see that it is not a problem for you or for the company in the future.

D – It's come to my attention that on such and such a date, you did __X__ (or you failed to do ___Y___). This is a critical mistake. The impact of this is (share how dangerous it is, how it can affect people, profits, reputation, etc.) Here is the documentation (share whatever documentation there might be.)

E - This is one of the most serious mistakes that can be made in this work and it is absolutely unacceptable. I am concerned for the safety of other employees and for our clients. I am angry that these mistakes were made, and I am concerned about what caused this to happen. I do not want to hear excuses, but I am concerned if there is some issue with you that I need to be aware of. Is there anything you'd like to share with me that you might need some help or support with?
S - Our facility cannot have these kinds of mistakes. This is extremely serious. I will be suspending you for two weeks without pay. I want you to be able to continue your career here and be successful. During the two weeks, you will need to complete the online course regarding these safety, regulatory and corporate requirements and complete the testing to show that you know all of the protocols.

C - At the end of your suspension, if you have successfully completed the course and the testing, you will be reinstated. You need to know that if you make any further such errors, your employment will be terminated. I do not want to see that happen. You have been a valuable employee and are well-liked by other staff and by the clients. I want to see you succeed and continue working here.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #9 - A colleague repeatedly forgets to copy you on emails that would be helpful to you. You've asked before, but they continue to leave you out of the loop.

Sometimes, humor can be helpful. If you have used the DESC script with this person in the past and they are still not copying you on emails, you might consider making a big sign of some sort, carrying it into their office and telling them you want to provide them a reminder to copy you on emails. You'll need to judge if they are the kind of person who will take it in stride, laugh with you and at the same time get the message. Then you could follow up with another script.

Intro - OK, so I'm making a joke, but I really do need you to copy me!

D - The latest one you forgot was ABC email to XYZ yesterday.

E - Dale, I am getting frustrated when I find out about an email that I needed to know about to be able to do my job correctly. I am worried that I'm going to look bad or get caught with egg on my face because I didn't know about something. My reputation is important to me.

S - Please put a sticky note on your screen to remind you. How else can you help yourself to remember? Would it be helpful to talk through the kinds of things I need? Would a list for you be helpful? Let's work together to figure out a way that you can remember to send me what I need.

C - I will really appreciate your help keeping me in the loop. This is a team effort and I need your help to succeed at my job. Let's work together so we can all look good. Thanks for your help. And if you can go a whole month remembering to copy me on all the emails I need, I'll buy you lunch at your favorite Thai restaurant!

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #10 - You learn that a colleague has complained about you behind your back. The person who told you asked you not to say anything.

Intro – I've been thinking about what you told me yesterday and I'd like to ask for your help with an approach.

D – Yesterday, you told me that Jane had complained to you about me, but that you did not want me to talk with her about it.

E – I feel you thought it would help me to know, yet by asking me not to talk with her, I feel now that my hands are tied and I can't deal with the real issue.

S – I would appreciate it if you would talk with Jane and suggest that she talk with me and tell her that you think I would be very open to discussing the matter. Please tell her I don't bite.

C – Jane and I need to be able to work together and resolve differences and it would go a long way toward improving our relationship, if you would encourage her to communicate her concerns directly.

Sample DESC Scripts

Problem #11 - A direct report has missed numerous project deadlines which affect others' ability to meet their deadlines. You specifically discussed the deadlines ahead of time with the individual, because this has happened before.

Intro – I asked you to meet with me to talk about project deadlines.

D – We have previously talked about the need for you to pay attention to deadlines, to look ahead at what is due when and schedule yourself accordingly. It has come to my attention that you did not finish your parts of the department projects on time. Part A was due on Tuesday last week, and you did not give it to _____ until Thursday. Part B was due to _____ on Wednesday of last week, and you did not turn it over until Friday. Part C was due yesterday, and _____ does not have it from you.

E – Deadlines are a critical part of our work. If we do not meet deadlines, it affects our profits as well as our customer relations. When you do not meet your deadline, it puts others in the department behind and our whole department fails to meet deadlines in getting our part of the project to the next department. That makes everyone on this team look bad, including me. It makes other departments angry with us. It calls into question the competence of the whole team and my ability to manage the team.

S – This is the second time I have talked with you about this so you are receiving a written warning today that will go in your file. From this date forward, I need you to meet every deadline without exception. Your job is not only to do the work, but to do it ON TIME. What is preventing you from meeting your deadlines?

(At this point, listen, problem-solve, but remain firm. Coaching at this point is appropriate to help the employee solve their own problems. Ask them questions that help them figure out what they need to do to meet deadlines consistently. Ask questions that begin with the words "what" and "how" and avoid asking questions that start with "why.")

C – I need to tell you that if you miss additional deadlines, I will not be able to keep you on my team and your employment will be terminated. Your work is quality work. I hired you for your expertise. You definitely bring a great value here, and I want you to remain part of the team. I want to see you flourish and advance in this company.

(Do not threaten to fire someone without first talking with Human Resources to make sure you have provided the necessary documentation and have followed any company policies regarding progressive discipline.)