

Dear Angela,

1.6.04

Last week you said you thought we should talk and that you would catch me in the gardens in the afternoon. Here are some of my thoughts.

I need a resolution to this situation which will last.

Before we can move forwards I need you to understand and accept my perspective, even if it might be hard for you to see it all from that point of view. Please try to read the following in a constructive light and without resorting to anger.

Firstly I would like to acknowledge that you have been dedicating an enormous amount of time and effort to the project in the last couple of months. I am the only person to whom it is a greater frustration if things are not running smoothly.

For my part, I have been enormously fulfilled, gratified and rewarded by the process of teaching the courses and seeing the end results. I consider this the greatest achievement of my life, as I explained to everyone last year. I have also enjoyed the degree to which I can be professionally immersed in this process.

As evidence of my ongoing commitment and wish to improve the quality of my delivery, I should mention that I have now been accepted onto the Post-Compulsory PGCE at Hallam University beginning in September.

And then out of the blue for me comes this Dispute!

I was aware that you've been under a lot of stress – I'd heard about sorting out the Opps 4 Vols figures and can only imagine what a headache that's been.

I remembered that you vetoed colour printing even though I suggested several practical compromises. I thought it was legitimate to question your decision. But I let it go at the time.

I was confused by your vehemence in relation to organising the Open Days, going to the extent of bringing Steve in, because you and I had not talked about this at all previous to that team meeting. You had only talked to Androo at that point. I am happy to accept responsibility for the Open Days if you want me to lead.

I didn't understand why you issued the oral warning so suddenly when you knew I had a pre-arranged meeting.

I was shocked that the letter was loaded with references to the past when I firmly believed all that was behind us...I remember our mediation session with Darrell.

I couldn't believe that Daz had come up with such a damning inditement, based on the proceeds of one meeting.

I myself went to the meeting prepared to flaunt and celebrate our successes and congratulate everyone on a great team effort. And I was looking forward to more progress now the systems are all set up.

Communication

You've brought actions against me for my "tone of voice", my "attitude" and my "behaviour" in the past. Without considerable explanation and clarification, these are meaningless generic terms. I am unable to respond or adapt to such vague, undefined gesturing.

Cries for help.

Every time you resort to discipline, you seem to be asking for help, but you are of course alienating the only person who can really help with the situation, me.

Positive suggestions.

I need you to see my point of view without being threatened or accused. I've repeatedly refused to take my problems through any formal procedure because my stance is one of professional commitment and dedication to my subject. I hope this is also evidence for you that I am in no way vindictive.

Who am I?

I am proud and amazed that I have been able to work with people from all backgrounds and at all ability levels here. I am unsettled, however, when you introduced me by calling me some kind of green "**wizard**" at the big O4V meeting with Lynn last year.

I remember when you tried to convince me that I had **Asperger's** syndrome, because I couldn't read your non-verbal signals.

You've repeatedly suggested I'm **difficult** and tried to get me to confess to it.

I lose patience when I hear through others that you think I'm a **misogynist!**

I am just an Organic food grower, please.

Change

At the end of the mediation session with Darrell in December, where we all agreed to forget past differences and work constructively together, you said that you wanted me to admit that I was a "difficult man". To me this indicates a sort of prejudice against me whereby negative expectations will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact my life is far simpler than most, which is why and how I have the capacity to devote so much of my life to others. I have changed outwardly and inwardly over the past 4 years especially. I now wear smart clothing, which engenders confidence and respect in all who work with me. I now consider my work here to be all about people rather than the necessities of site improvement as when I was volunteering in the early years. These are major shifts in my orientation and are obvious to all I come into contact with. I want you to accept that I am capable of change and am actually willing to adapt, if it brings benefit to the project.

Mistakes

You have been big enough to admit to making mistakes in the past. Like when we arranged to visit the LSC in Derby together and then you went without me because you considered me a “liability”.

When we were meeting at your house, in your room, to discuss the LSC bid a year ago, you questioned Daz’ capacity to do the job. You then objected when I echoed, questioning Androo’s appetite for paperwork. You took this to imply that I wanted to ‘get rid of him’ and ejected me for suggesting that there may be other staffing options.

Fear

I am afraid of you in your capacity as manager because you make decisions I can’t understand and readily resort to a process which threatens my livelihood. Rather than conceding the logic of an argument, you often resort to imposing your point. Sometimes this is equivalent to dictatorship.

Crisis management

I have perceived a series of foreseeable crises, which myself and Darrell and others have pointed out and you seem to have ignored, which inevitably precipitates bigger crises at a later date.

1. Darrell and I suggested a materials budget in the Opps 4 Vols bid.
2. We proposed accessing expertise to help wean us onto the LSC systems.

Helpful.

I have constantly tried to help you above and beyond fulfilling my basic working commitments.

1. My suggestions for the Lavendrinth were specifically conceived as a thank you to you personally for what you’d achieved in setting up the project etc.
2. It was me who brought in John Mortimer to try to relieve Daz of the financial record-keeping.

Further

You may be able to see that I could have a Catalogue of wrongs, with no way of gaining positive outcomes and resolutions, which makes me feel powerless and with no recourse to improvement.

Patti

You repeatedly claimed that the reason for Patti’s dismissal was “personal differences” between her and me. I would like you to remember that the actual reason was **COERCION** of volunteers as I documented extensively with confirmed witness statements. I did and do not understand why you seemed to side with an ex-worker instead of supporting the present and future worker.

Morale

I've experienced three distinct levels of demotivation:

1. No help. I've had to accept that I have to struggle along and cannot expect positive help in achieving project goals. Like when I struggled to maintain a second volunteering day on a Tuesday in G4H yr 1. Like trying to get Daz to support delivery to students (booklist etc.).
2. Out to get me. I consider the use of Disciplinary Procedures to be an admission of the failure of management. You have repeatedly, actually regularly every 6 months, resorted to such actions, none of which have been upheld. Use of this authoritarian tactic cannot help but alienate me.
3. Undermining project. Sometimes you seem to want the project to fail or under-perform. When you declare an absolute veto on something, like the printed publicity, especially when there are obvious compromises, it seems that you would rather have the project fail, as you implied in an aside at the disputed meeting.

Transparency

I have always been unhappy and sometimes dismayed by the process of controlling and censoring the minutes of team meetings. I'm not claiming that my memory is perfect, but when there are two conflicting views of reality, it undermines your sanity. I'd prefer a true and accurate record and the presence of students.

The rest of the world will just see the awful contradiction between an organisation that promotes itself on the basis of the motto "personal creative growth" and yet issues such barbed warnings and has a disciplinary committee!

Blame Culture

You suggested this in February 04 in response to Daz and Androo squabbling. You have been in charge of this project for 3+ years. It could be a reflection of the tone or example you've set.

Scape-goating

I have repeatedly felt that you are using me as an excuse for failure and as a distraction from other issues. I am not prepared to accept responsibility for others' shortcomings. The greatest danger for any grouping, especially anything involving beliefs, is that it begins to define itself by excluding people.

Too honest.

When you say in a team meeting that you are going on holiday precisely to escape from "you lot" (project workers), I can understand what you mean. But the impression you give by expressing such thoughts to us is demotivating and divisive. We have been most solid and resolved as a team when we are joined in adversity.

Last time

I found myself facing disciplinary procedure for daring to suggest alternative organisational and management strategies when the new funding began. At the time I was working on G4H. I still cannot understand why I was being sanctioned in one job for making constructive suggestions about how another project should run.

You then insisted upon an extensive programme of 1 – 1's which were all on Tuesdays, which obviously clashed with teaching sessions. I have to note that we've had 2 hours contact time this year, part of which was you telling me about your holiday (in which I had no interest).

Effective communication

If you lie and commit those lies to paper, you will be found out. Like claiming to have tried to talk to me before resorting to an "oral warning", when you and I know that Steve and Stuart were present when you said "I've had a complaint from Daz and I have no choice but to issue you...".

Priorities.

When you wanted to talk about this "oral warning", I had already greeted and was keen to meet with Ann Roberts from Chesterfield Adult Education, which had been organised over a month before. I am entitled to 24 hours notice of meetings and was completely within my rights to request that you wait until after that meeting to explain what you wanted. I obviously found it hard to forget about this disruption to my professional duties, but managed to have a useful and mutually beneficial meeting.

Transference and separation.

I have found it a challenge to protect volunteers, clients and students from some of the negative aspects of your management, especially when you are shouting at me in front of volunteers. I am conscious of how vulnerable some of our supporters are. In the case I mention, you severely disturbed Simon, who has had a nervous breakdown (and is medicated), and Diane, who has a record of clinical depression and came "close to" a breakdown after managerial pressures in her previous career.

I know

Many times over the last 3 years, you have invoked the executive power of the Trust when I know that they are uninformed or at odds with the views you express. You've cried wolf so often.

Help

Whenever I've asked for your help, like to improve Androo's performance, I've been branded a trouble-maker and been ostracised or attacked. I gave up expecting positive responses to my requests for improvements.

Making decisions

Crucial decisions like the overall naming of a project do need to be consensual to some degree. There are specific reasons why the terms “Gardening” and “Training” are inappropriate in the current context.

Surely you can see that imposing these kinds of terms without consultation can actually undermine and destroy the foundations of what we’ve been working for all these years.

The gardens projects have been one part of your responsibilities, but they are the whole of my job and a major part of my vocation.