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# Complaints at work

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Hopefully we all enjoy our work, but it would be unrealistic to assume we never have problems. Sometimes we perceive these are the fault of someone else and we want to complain. Complaints can be about almost anything, personal relationships, harassment, policies, job duties, pay, parking or the vending machine.

Some complaints might appear to be minor, but they may not feel minor to the person concerned.

Perhaps you are the person receiving complaints and you need to know how to respond. It is very important that a complaint is handled correctly, not handling it correctly can have serious consequences.

If you are making a complaint to your manager, don't be tempted to discuss the issue with everyone else if the complaint is sensitive, it might be helpful in some circumstances as others might have a different view point or knowledge of how something has been resolved in the past, but if the complaint concerns personal details about someone for example, you should be discrete.

Many problems can be resolved informally with a quiet chat. Try to be sensitive to the timing of this, don't ask your manager for a quiet word if she is in the middle of something important, maybe ask for some time in advance and make an appointment, this will allow proper attention to your complaint and hopefully you will not be disturbed.

It is easy in the heat of the moment for feelings to run high, when what is needed is a cool head and facts. If you are making a complaint try to keep to the facts and prepare for any meeting you are having. Either practice what you want to say or perhaps write it down. Are there any witnesses? check the dates, why do you think it happened? why are you complaining? show the person any relevant evidence you have. Solving a problem is often a two-way process, involving both parties listening to the other.

Keep a note of what was said at the meeting, particularly of any action your employer agrees to take. If you have someone with

you at the meeting, they could take the notes for you. If your employer agrees to do something, make sure they set a date for doing it so it can be followed up.

It is important at this stage that your complaint is taken seriously. This will hopefully avoid the need for a formal grievance procedure and even an employment tribunal later on if it is not resolved.

Obviously, it will depend on the problem and how serious it is as to how you raise your complaint. If you are involved in a formal process such as a disciplinary, dismissal, redundancy or grievance procedure, you would probably be advised to make your complaint formal and in writing. You may need advice in these situations, similarly if you think you are being discriminated against.

If your employer has a handbook and policies, it can often help to familiarise yourself with these, they should offer guidelines and expectations and rules of the workplace that may be relevant and helpful.

If you've tried these steps to resolve your complaint and it hasn't worked and you are still aggrieved by the situation, you might need to consider either writing to your employer or raising a formal grievance. It might also be helpful to keep a diary if this is appropriate in case the situation continues and you need to refer to it. Equally if your manager has made a decision you are not happy with, you may have to accept this decision. (A grievance procedure will have an appeal process).

One of the hardest things to accept about a dispute in the workplace is that the person you have a problem with is in the right and you are in the wrong. Perhaps you have made a mistake about something or your performance is not satisfactory. It can be difficult to accept this, but you might need to do so. Ask your employer for support to resolve any matters. Apologising is always a good start.

**For further support with this or any other HR issue, BVNA members can call the BVNA Advisory Service Helpline on 01822 870270 or email [AdvisoryService@bvna.co.uk](mailto:AdvisoryService@bvna.co.uk)**