

## How to address corridor combat

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Everyone seems to be doing it. Probably all of us have engaged in it — some of us more so than others. But, what is corridor combat and how can the problem be addressed?

Corridor combat is when two people (who are not getting on well at work) pass each other in the corridor, and smile at each other while muttering silently ‘f\*\*k you’.

George works in an office and he makes and receives many phone calls daily. He finds it easier to wear a headset. Desiree works for George and often cannot tell whether George is on a call. Daily she will walk over to George to ask him a question — only to find George frown at her, point to his headset and shake his head.

Off the phone or not, George and Desiree rarely talk to each other. Desiree rarely gets her questions answered, and so she makes errors that George points out to her without providing any assistance: ‘At this level you’re expected to get it right’.

Frustrated, Desiree makes her phone calls on speakerphone and plays her radio loudly.

Corridor combat is ineffective. George and Desiree make some poor decisions about the way they behave towards each other. Their friction is a source of office gossip — even though none of their colleagues is willing to help out with an office relationship that is getting out of control.

### How to address the problem?

According to consultancy firm [ProActive ReSolutions’s](#) managing director Joe Moore:

‘In most companies, when negative behaviour happens, people just don’t know how to address it. They are afraid of confrontation. They aren’t sure what their responsibilities are as individuals, and they aren’t sure what words to choose.’

Moore says that even when employees and managers do work up the nerve to address unhelpful behaviour, they often employ tactics that cause greater anxiety and misunderstanding. Without meaning to, people take actions that can feel like an attack, spinning the confronted individual into defensive behaviours, denial and resentment.

‘Corridor combat is an almost daily occurrence inside of most large organisations, and smaller organisations are far from immune. Educating managers and employees to listen actively and speak constructively can help save millions of dollars, hours of productivity, and lots of headaches,’ Moore says.

### Tactics to use

Here are six basic communication tactics to use when you’re dealing with charged situations in your workplace:

1. *Don’t react in anger.* Express your feelings in a clear and non-threatening way. Creating an open, receptive environment reduces the chances of escalating the conflict.
2. *Be specific when describing the offending situation.* Just say what you saw or what you heard. But don’t state any assumptions about intention. This limits the odds of the person responding defensively.
3. *Explain how the situation has affected you.* Often people don’t ask or even consider about how others are affected by their behaviour, so addressing this directly can help people see some of the consequences of their behaviour.
4. *Ask what they were thinking at the time of the offending action and how the situation makes them feel.* Aim for direct answers. Get clarification if needed. Understanding their point of view is the best way to learn how to work with them.

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5. *Acknowledge your contribution to the situation.* Accepting your share of the responsibility takes away the blame and establishes an even ground.
6. *Invite the other person to work with you to improve the situation.* This takes the individual off the hot seat, and gives them the power to make a change for the better.

**Source:** ProActive ReSolutions builds more respectful behaviour between people working with clients in Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States to:

- prevent problem behaviour by building more respectful day-to-day interactions
- repair relationships broken through conflict by bringing people together to reconcile differences
- protect against harm with our expertise in violence risk assessment, management and training.