

## **Ask Ms. Carmen Courtesy Your Office Etiquette Expert**

Dear Ms. Courtesy,

One of my coworkers has a problem with the temperature in our office and turns up the air conditioner without asking the rest of us how we feel about it. We have tried to compromise by turning up the air conditioner about five degrees, which is manageable for us if we put sweaters on, but this person insists on turning up the air conditioner more without finding out our comfort level. We are all freezing and having a hard time concentrating on our work. What is the best way to address this problem without hurting my coworker's feelings?

–Shivering Shiela

Dear Shivering:

Climate control can become a heated issue in any office, especially during the summer months. The good news is, this problem can be resolved before tempers flare and your relationship with your coworker gets chilly.

As Gail Jern, Human Resources Representative at Westaff, points out, being conservative with the air conditioner dial is always a good idea.

“I have learned from an HVAC person that a thermostat should never be moved more than one degree or two at a time,” says Jern. “One or two degree changes make a significant difference. After an adjustment, allow the room to stabilize to the new setting.”

With this in mind, Jern suggests to “make it a policy that the thermostat not be moved more than one degree at a time, and may not be changed for 30 minutes after that so that the room temperature has time to adjust.”

Jern also points out that defrosting an office temperature battle may be as straightforward as moving desk locations. You can have an HVAC person make recommendations based on where the office's cold zones are and the direction of air flow. That way someone who is prone to being hot, like your coworker, is seated directly in line with the cooler air, while the chilly employees are in the hotter spots.

You may also need to consider that your coworker's problem with the temperature could be part of a larger problem: this person may be an office bully. According to business etiquette consultant Gloria Starr, president and founder of Florida-based Global Success Strategies, Inc., this person may simply be an office bully who is not interested in getting a consensus.

In that case, says Starr, it is the company management's responsibility to establish a policy about the office temperature. Some companies even go as far as putting a plastic lockbox on top of the thermostat to ensure temperature control.

Dear Miss Courtesy,

My energetic new employee talks very loudly in the office and has the inclination to interrupt everyone. She started working for me about a month ago, and this behavior has been consistent since she was hired, so it is probably part of her personality. Other employees sometimes get irritated with her interruptive tendencies, but she doesn't seem to notice. How can I tell her nicely to lower her voice and listen to other people?

-Quiet Constance

Dear Quiet:

It won't take a thunderous confrontation to get your talkative new employee to turn down the volume. This can be handled with tact so that the employee gets the message without taking offense.

Florida-based business etiquette expert Gloria Starr, president and founder of Global Success Strategies, Inc., says that you can muffle the complaint with some compliments. Tell the employee that "we love your energy, but your voice resonates from the walls," says Starr. Then suggest that your employee soften her voice to help other employees concentrate on their work.

If that approach does not work, Starr says that management should put out a memo pointing out that silence is golden and a quieter work environment is more conducive to a productive workplace.

When addressing your employee's tendency to interrupt everyone, the same approach can be used.

Westaff's Human Resources Representative Gail Jern says to pull the talker aside and say, "We all appreciate your enthusiasm to share your thoughts and ideas, but I have noticed that you tend to jump right in while others are speaking and interrupt their conversation. I see that you are excited about adding your thoughts, but you need to allow others to complete what they are saying."

Then provide the interrupter with two or three recent examples of this behavior, and remind her that others want a chance to speak as well. "Let her know that conversations with different points of view are fun for all and that everyone should have their chance to speak—without interruption," adds Jern. Tell her, "I see you are excited about adding your thoughts, but you need to allow others to complete what they are saying."

If this approach fails, you need to be more direct, but diplomatic. If the employee interrupts again, take her aside and tell her that she is still interrupting and should hold in thoughts until the other person is finished. You need to be firm with this person, but still address her in a tactful way.