

correctly, messengers will not be terrified to make the report and a few may even feel glad to do so. After learning this procedure, you will have made problem reporting something for which no one has a valid excuse not to perform. So here's the procedure.

DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER

1. Train yourself to physically clap your hands for joy and smile warmly as soon as you realize that standing before you is a messenger of bad news. Add a few words of welcome to reduce anxiety. Clear your brain to concentrate on listening.
2. Allow the reporter to continue without interruption while you smile warmly as if you have heard some of this before, because you probably have. Perhaps you can start to take some careful notes. Note taking keeps us occupied, keeps us from missing anything and permits us to slow down the reporter.
3. At the end of the person's report, ask very politely if that's all there is or if there is more. Send the clear message that you are in no hurry and that quality of the details is your only desire.
4. The reporter may be ready to discuss corrective action. If so, take down this input before you start asking questions. You might desire to reverse this, but remember we are far more worried about the reporter's feelings than yours, so let them speak. When the reporter stops, ask if there are any more details worth knowing. Do not assume that the report is complete until there is a definite statement to that effect. Then worry that some details have been left out.
5. Now, thank the reporter for the information and tell them how much you appreciate the person's effort to tell you. Perhaps a reference to your reporting rule can be made and how important that is to your ability to do your own job. "Well, that's quite a load, George. Thanks a lot for bringing it to my attention. You know I've got this rule about reporting all problems, so I am really grateful you came to me with it. If you don't report the problems, I'll never

be able to do my job. This is really important to me and I appreciate your report.”

6. Only now can you ask questions. At this point, you should have been able to gain composure and prepare yourself. You have had plenty of time to mentally note what’s not been said, what’s been implied that needs amplification, what the reporter’s body language gave you that was missed in words and what points need clarification. The reporter’s body language should have sent relative importance, degree of hazard, whether there is more to the story and the like. You have also had time to compare this event with others in your experience so that you may now apply previous lessons learned.

7. So go back over the problem carefully with your questions, even to the extent of full repeats. Do not be accusatory or in any way place the reporter on the defensive. Remember, you are on the same team, so the questions must be professional, unemotional and matter of fact. You set the tone. You might even explain this fact and that you want to ask some questions so you will fully understand the nature of the problem, and after all, making things worse by taking inappropriate actions is not your intent.

8. Beyond the problem itself, there are root causes that are the people problems of this book. Your questions must probe for these possibilities. Frequency of occurrence, similarity to other problems, association with particular groups or individuals as well as the reporter’s tone and body language can be great signposts. “I don’t want you to criticize your peers (or boss), but what do you think, George, about how the problem got started? How can we do better?” Careful, circumspect probing that begs for possible answers is the rule.

9. Any need for fixing people problems will slowly become apparent with greater understanding of the problem and as solutions are developed. People problems can only be understood after some detailed discussion. The wrong orders/directives, goals, training, tools or procedures are the pervasive causes of issues. So pervasive that laying blame on a people problem is not possible until the very

end of the process. Do not attempt it in the beginning, as it will really shut down the problem report.

10. Ask if the reporter has any recommendations as to how we should proceed, if not already provided. Ask questions to get all the details and the reasoning. People who spend time using their brainpower to figure out actions must be recognized and praised.

11. So the careful non-aggressive but firm questioning is done. The quality of the report will dictate the number and variety of the questions. There may be just a few. A by-product will be an understanding of the reporter and perhaps some practical training for the reporter to the extent his or her own homework was not completely finished. After the above process, rest assured the next report from this person will be of higher quality and will require fewer questions on your part.

12. Now ask if there is anything else that might be important to know in designing what we do from here.

13. At the very end, thank and appreciate once again, and with a smile and a lilt to your voice, let the messenger go. “Thanks again for bringing up the problem. I know it is not easy for you, but it is very important to me. Thanks especially for bearing with my questions and being so open with your responses.” You say this last part whether true or not, because this makes the next time better.

Blind adherence to the Don’t Shoot the Messenger procedure and a solid attempt to have your body language exude the positive, bright and cheerful tone intended, is highly recommended. Every boss should welcome the tough problems with open arms because without them you would provide little value and not be needed.

Bosses can only truly earn their pay in times of great difficulty. If they get tough when the going gets tough rather than becoming unhappy or vengeful or rattled or reactive, they can set a great example and show great leadership!

Did I say leadership? Did the script above pass all of the value standards to an 8-10 level? Check it for positive attitude and enthusiasm and smiles and cheerleading. Check it for humility, fairness,