

**SMART WORKPLACES BY HR TO GO, INC - NOVEMBER 2005**

**HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT - OUTSOURCE IT!**

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## Smelly Co-Worker? Six Tips for Bringing Up Personal Hygiene Issues

By Kerry Patterson, co-author of "Crucial Conversations"

If you work in a cubicle environment and sit next to someone who has a personal hygiene problem that is hard to ignore, you may be suffering when you don't have to.

People typically feel uncertain about bringing up issues on this topic for two obvious reasons: One, it's not as if hygiene is insurmountable -- it's more of a convenience issue. Two, the other person just might be hurt, humiliated or offended.

We often look at the balance between cost and benefit and choose to continue to suffer. In fact, the fear of humiliating the other person can be so great that some people absolutely refuse to ever attempt to bring up the problem.

Here are some helpful tips on what to do when discussing what could be an embarrassing topic:

### **1. Keep the scope of this problem small and the tone breezy and relaxed.**

Don't even think about mentioning that everyone but the person with the problem knows about it. This is an important data point for why you should say something, but it would be far too insulting to actually say aloud.

### **2. Be very careful in your use of terms.**

While there is no word that doesn't carry with it a bit of a stigma, words like "stink" or "offend," certainly don't work. Similarly, don't go for politically correct or cute language such as "hygiene impaired." This isn't a laughing matter.

### **3. Start the conversation by sharing your good intentions.**

The last thing you want to do is make others feel like you are attacking or blaming them. You want them to feel safe discussing the issue, so begin by making it known that you have their best interest in mind. For example, "I wonder if I could talk about something that would help me out at work a bit. It's not a huge deal, but it's worth mentioning."

**4. Limit the scope of the problem.**

Once again, don't say it's been going on forever, is causing you huge grief, or that everyone else has talked about the issue. Since it's the first time you've brought it up, treat it as something that has only recently become an issue.

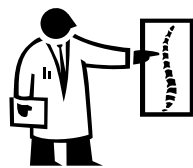
**5. Keep the discussion private.**

This means not only during the conversation, but also after. This will help the other person feel safe talking to you and remedying the problem.

**6. If it's feasible, try to give the other person an out or excuse.**

For example, "Recently I get the feeling that maybe you've been exercising before work or something. In any case, we work so close together that I'm wondering if we can talk about a change that's affecting our working environment." At this point, you've delicately placed the problem in the open and the quicker you finish the discussion, the better. Accept any excuse they might come up with -- bogus or otherwise. This is all about helping the other person save face. Once again, keep the tone easy and relaxed.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember as you approach such a highly sensitive topic is that you care about the other person and want to help him or her address the issue without feeling humiliated in the process. Keeping this in mind will go a long way toward setting the tone and helping an awkward discussion go quickly and smoothly.



**Using Your Bean Can Save Your Back**

Of the 900,000 disabling back injuries that occur each year in the United States, more than half result from trying to lift objects. The National Safety Council (NSC) says that since lifting and carrying are "power jobs," it's easy for back damage to occur. Once it does, it can take a long time for the person to return to normal activities, including working. Most of us ignore our backs until they give us a painful reminder of our carelessness. People who take care of their backs are far less likely to run into problems. The NSC says power

warm-ups - slow stretches before starting each shift - will help workers ease into their workday and avoid back strain.

**Warm-up Exercises include:**

**The leg and back warm-up:** Prop one foot on a chair or stool for support. Take a deep breath. Ease forward slowly, keeping your back slightly curved. Blow slowly outward as you ease forward to a seven count. Repeat seven times. Switch and do the same with your other foot.

**Backbend:** Stand with your feet about 12 inches apart. Support the small of your back with your hands. Hold your stomach in firmly and take a deep breath. Arch backward, bending your head and neck as you go and blowing air out slowly to a count of seven. Repeat seven times.

**Then:**

**Size up the load:** Tip it on its side to see if you can carry it comfortably alone. Get help if the load is too big or awkward. Check for nails, splinters, rough strapping and sharp edges.

**Lift it right:** Ensure your footing is solid. Keep your back straight, with no curving or slouching. Center your body over your feet, get a firm grip on the object and pull it close to you. Pull your stomach in firmly. Lift with your legs, not your back. If you need to turn, move your feet.

**10 Success Killers**

1. Comparing yourself with someone else
2. Not facing your fears
3. Leaving a job undone
4. Feeling sorry for yourself
5. Speaking like Ozzy Osbourne
6. Dressing like Anna Nicole Smith
7. Saying you hate computers

8. Not staying in touch with family
9. Saying "I can't"
10. Having more regrets than dreams

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