

# Someone is Lying. Who Should I Fire?



Consider making changes before deciding if you should fire an employee

Question: One employee has accused the other of stealing money from her workstation. She said she observed her co-worker in her work area when he had no reason to be there. Her co-worker denies he took the money. This is not the first time money and other items have gone missing. If one of my employees has been stealing, I really believe I need to fire him or her. I do not know who to believe. What are my options?

## **Beware the Broken Lie Detector**

Sometimes things are exactly as they seem and sometimes they are not. It is no easy task to decipher what you have in front of you at any given time.

In a 'She Said, He Said' scenario, it can be very difficult to know what happened. Take steps to gather information from each person and, if appropriate, relevant witnesses. Compare what you hear with what makes reasonable sense. During this process, you must partially rely on your ability to read the people involved and the situation presented by them. Unlike in the movies, you will probably not obtain a confession. Sometimes disputes arise from different perspectives and interpretations, and sometimes disputes arise from one or more lying parties. You must be careful about reading too much into the 'behaviour' or 'guilty reaction' of one party. Nerves and individual differences may be perceived as guilt, while an experienced deceiver may successfully present himself as the innocent.

**Personal Bias** When there is a communication discrepancy between two employees, it is easier to believe the person you have known longer or like better. Remember, this tendency colours your judgment. Personal bias includes factors such as differences in age, gender, cultural background, disability and other factors. These factors may weigh on you unconsciously during your investigation and subsequent decision-making. Before drawing any conclusions, be cognizant of possible unconscious biases.

Unless you have hard evidence, a witness, video footage, or you find someone with the money, odds are, you will never know what happened for certain.

## **Your Decision: Fire One, or Keep Both**

If you cannot discern the truth with 100% accuracy, you may still be able to fire the employee you want to fire without cause. Absent of discrimination claims, this depends on your agreements with the employee. If you follow this course, terminate

cleanly and do not cite the incident in dispute. Without cause is without cause. However, if you really cannot determine the truth, you may choose not to fire anyone at all.

If you suspect one employee is guilty and choose not to fire him, consider the following:

1. Put the employee on notice.
2. Explain your concerns and indicate that you will begin to closely monitor them.
3. Warn this employee not to retaliate or initiate any conflict with the other employee (counsel the other employee to do the same).
4. Consider training or a mentor to train and set an example for this employee.

## **Opportunity For Change and Improvement**

If you decide to fire an employee, or keep both employees, take this as an opportunity to learn and make changes to improve your workplace.

### **Actions for the Future**

- Determine if there are ways to better safeguard money or other equipment. Ask your employees to suggest changes.
- Make changes in the way people work including processes for access to other peoples work stations.
- Ascertain if you can make a change the design of the workspace to increase visibility.
- Increase surveillance including installing surveillance cameras (if allowable and not in a private workspace) and notify all employees of this change.
- Provide additional supervision and training
- Increase the presence of managers or others, at variable intervals.

### **TODAY'S EXPERT**



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- Provide all employees more training on procedures relevant to workplace accountability and observation
- A word of caution: You can encourage your employees to be more aware of their surroundings but do not ask them to generally spy or report on other employees.

It may be easier on you sometimes to just fire someone and not have to deal with the situation anymore. However, to improve the situation in the longer term trying to take reasonable and appropriate actions to make changes that may payoff in the future.