

Strengthening Through Scripting

Practice how to respond to a problem.

Courage and Risk

Patterson Smith¹ examined why bystanders don't speak up when they observe fraud. Smith's premise is that knowing does not necessarily lead to doing. We may desire to do the right thing, but we tend to convince ourselves that the price is too high.

Under pressure, our inherent disposition – our lizard brain – is to revert to self-preservation. But courage necessitates selflessness, and it is only when we take action that courage becomes a virtue. Fortunately, this can be cultivated through practice and by preparing ourselves before stressful situations arise. This training helps to empower individuals to move to action. Moreover, if instead of blaming others, we operate in humility, we gain more courage.

Practice how to respond to a problem

Courage is a skill that can be learned. However, it is difficult to be courageous during a moment of high pressure and stress. This is where scripting comes in. Scripting involves practicing answers to questions out loud with a trusted colleague. By practicing how to respond to a problem (e.g. fraud) before it happens, we mitigate risk.

Think of an unethical situation that you have faced or are facing at work. The goal is to get to the right outcome without blowing up the relationship. Practice asking or making some variation of the following questions and statements designed to achieve that goal.

1) Is there any reason we are doing this?

An example would be a leader who wants to record revenue that hasn't yet been earned – otherwise known as fraud!

We start with a simple question to cause the person to pause and reflect on their decision. Most times, the question leads someone to reconsider their decision.

Mission accomplished – relationship maintained, ethical outcome achieved.

If this question doesn't work, then we move to the next question.

2) Could we get some help to make sure we are doing the right thing?

We up the ante slightly by suggesting we seek help. Again, this question often leads the person to rethink their plans. If not, step 3 is next.



3) Good, bad, good response.

This is a statement that looks like this – we always want to make sure our financial records are accurate (good); we would never want to erode investor trust (bad); so let's make sure our information is accurate (good).

In most cases, one of the first three steps will achieve the goal – relationship maintained, ethics achieved.

If not, time to get firmer with step 4.

4) Is there anything I can say to change your mind?

This is our final hope that the person will rethink their plans. If not, time to take things to the wall.

5) If you are unwilling to change your mind, then this is what I'll need to do.

This might mean you say something like “I'm sorry, but I disagree with your decision. If you are going to recognize revenue this way, then I'll need to inform the chief financial officer.”

While taking this step is regrettable, we are prepared to place ethics before a relationship. Not easy, though necessary, if the first four steps didn't work.

In most cases, you can resolve an ethical lapse and deescalate a conflict in the first three responses while upholding integrity and maintaining the relationships. In high pressure situations, however, many say nothing because they are scared, or they jump to the last two questions too soon, risking a torn relationship before they needed to take a drastic step. This scripting exercise will develop the courage needed to work through difficult situations.



1 Cressey, Donald (1973). *Other People's Money: Study in the Social Psychology of Embezzlement* (Patterson Smith series in criminology, law enforcement & social problems, publication no. 202) Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith.