

## HOW to BLOW the WHISTLE without BLOWING YOUR CAREER

- **First, tend to your safety.** If raising the issue to the offender directly will cause you harm, seek security, HR, or legal assistance. If not, take the following steps.
- **Gather data.** Gather all the data you can to help make your case. The clearer your data, the more likely you are to be persuasive.
- **Avoid conspiracy.** If you have an obligation to report the offense, do so immediately. If the lapse is offensive but not reportable, confront the individual in a respectful but direct way.
- **Start by sharing your good intentions.** Begin by letting the other person know you have his or her best interest in mind.
- **Share your facts.** Lay out the concern using data—strip your explanation of any judgment or accusation.
- **Tentatively share your concerns.** As suspicious as the activity may seem or how clear your observations, there might be a reasonable explanation. Use tentative terms and expressions.
- **Get the other person's point of view.** Once you've described what you think you saw, ask the offender for his or her perspective. You are not inviting his or her view in order to surrender yours—just to ensure you have all the facts.
- **Take it up a level.** Finally, if you can't work it out to your satisfaction, either take it to your boss or HR. You've shown your respect by talking directly to the offender and now you're going to have to involve another party.

**ABOUT THE RESEARCH.** The study collected responses via an online survey of 926 individuals in September 2013. Margin of error is approximately 3%.

According to our research, while 63 percent of respondents regularly witness both minor and major ethical infractions, **employees confront only half of the unethical behavior they witness at work.**

Our study of 926 people found that the top three minor ethical violations include taking credit for someone else's work, taking extra long breaks, and calling in sick when actually well. A third of respondents reported seeing one of these minor infractions in the last week.

Taking unfair revenge, embezzling significant value, and coercing sexual favors are the most common major infractions observed. When these more gross violations are suspected, only one in four employees confront their unethical colleague.

Why do most stay mum when witnessing unethical behavior? The top "excuses" employees gave for not blowing the whistle include:

1. It might damage their career
2. It would have made the offender harder to work with
3. They didn't think they would be taken seriously
4. They weren't sure how to bring up their concerns

The study showed that those who speak up about small infractions are six times more likely to speak up about major ones—suggesting that it's more likely organizations can create ethical cultures when employees feel enabled to blow the whistle.

**About VitalSmarts**—An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science to help leaders and organizations change human behavior and achieve new levels of performance. VitalSmarts has identified four high-leverage skill sets that, when used in combination, create healthy corporate cultures. These skills are taught in the Company's award-winning training programs and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles: *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Accountability*, *Influencer*, and *Change Anything*. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than one million people worldwide. [www.vitalSMARTS.com](http://www.vitalSMARTS.com)

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## KEY RESULTS

**63%** of employees observe ethical infractions at work every month

Only **1/2** of the unethical behavior employees witness is reported

**44%** are not socially supported by their peers, boss, HR, or others in reporting major ethical infractions

Those who speak up about small infractions are **six times** more likely to speak up about major ones