

WORDS THAT WORK

SUPPORTING BUSINESS MANAGERS
TO RAISE AND ACT ON
CONCERNS AT WORK



INTEGRITY

We are honest, ethical
and transparent



KEY DET VALUES-LED BEHAVIOURS ALIGN TO WORDS THAT WORK



LEADERSHIP

Promote frank and honest discussions and have the courage to challenge the status quo



INTEGRITY

Ask questions, raise issues, speak up



RESPECT

Collaborate and engage constructively with each other working towards a common goal

A RESOURCE BY BUSINESS MANAGERS, FOR BUSINESS MANAGERS

Words that Work is a tool to help you find the words – and the confidence – to respond constructively to ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

Business Managers across the state were surveyed to identify common ethical dilemmas and the reasons we might use for not saying or doing anything.

The tool encourages you to challenge this thinking; it gives you alternative ways to think about the issues, understand the risks to you and your school, and enable you to take action with some simple words and phrases.

You can use the Words that Work yourself or suggest them to anyone who is unsure about how to voice a concern.

Managing concerns at the school-level is a good way to reach a quick resolution and prevent issues from escalating. It supports your colleagues to avoid mistakes and make good decisions that uphold confidence in staff and the school.

However if the situation is serious or involves suspected criminal behaviour, a formal report should be made through the appropriate channel. For example, Victoria Police, the Independent broad-based anti-corruption commission, the Victorian Ombudsman or the Department's Speak Up service.

Our responsibility doesn't end with raising concerns. If the unethical behaviour persists, it must be escalated.

The examples in this tool are not exhaustive. On the back page, you'll find a five-step approach to creating Words that Work for other situations as well as links to more information and support.

Words that Work is based on the *Giving Voice to Values* curriculum by Professor Mary Gentile of The University of Virginia, Darden School of Business. For more information visit givingvoicetovalues.thebook.com

WORDS THAT WORK

Identified ethical problem	Common reasons for not saying or doing anything	A different way to think about the problem
Financial/resources		
Noticing school resources being used for private purposes.	I think some staff may have been doing it for a while now. They think it's OK because they do so much for the school. I'll risk getting out of favour if I say anything.	What if other staff think this is OK and start doing it too? What if it gets lost or damaged, then students can't use it. If I ignore this, I might be complicit – and it might impact my reputation.
Observing non-receipt or banking of a significant amount of cash received (keeping it in the office).	It's too hard to find the time to receipt and record all cash received. They must have been in a rush. A receipt wasn't requested and it may have been recorded later in the day. It's probably a one off.	This will cause problems when we try and reconcile. The longer we leave it the harder it will be to keep track of. Even if there is no bad intention, it's a breach of policy and process and it puts the school at risk. It's not good practice to have lots of cash lying around.
Being asked to authorise payments on behalf of the delegate.	It's the way it's always been done. The delegate's busy and they trust me. It frees them up to focus on more important things. The payments are legitimate so it doesn't really matter.	If I do this, I am putting the delegate and myself at risk. If we organise it properly, and batch the work it won't take long or be an imposition. The only way the delegate can keep a clear picture of expenditure is to see exactly what payments are being made.
Being asked to process payments using funds intended for a different purpose.	It's about priorities, and this needs to come first. It's for the good of the students and will improve outcomes. The principal is the boss and they told me to do it.	If I do this now, who knows what else I will be expected to do? I need to draw a line. I am accountable at the end of the day. The money was intended to support a program/ outcome that may now be neglected. This may reflect poorly on the school in an audit

Suggested Words that Work

I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't say something. These are school resources and we don't want students to miss out.

We have to record every financial transaction to be accountable. Leaving cash around is not good practice, and can cause issues down the track.

I understand you are busy, but this is outside DET financial processes. You're the officer accountable, so it's important you're across this. It won't take long.

I'm concerned that the programs we've committed to won't be delivered, and that students and parents will be unhappy about that.

Identified ethical problem	Common reasons for not saying or doing anything	A different way to think about the problem	Suggested Words that Work
<p>Procurement</p> <p>Observing inappropriate relationships with providers, or improper procurement process; for example invoice splitting, or not obtaining proper quotes.</p>	<p>That provider has always worked for the school and they do a good job for a good price.</p> <p>There are no other providers in our area worth getting a quote from.</p> <p>It will cause waves in the community if we stop using our usual provider.</p> <p>It was an urgent job and a full procurement was going to take too long.</p> <p>The service is very specialised and they are the only ones who can provide it to us.</p>	<p>We need to be open and transparent so that there is no perception of favouritism.</p> <p>We don't know for sure who the best provider is unless we undertake a competitive process.</p> <p>If our usual provider best meets the criteria, they will get the job contract.</p> <p>Invoice splitting goes against the procurement guidelines and could mean we don't get the best outcome.</p> <p>The market is always moving and there may be new suppliers who could provide a better service.</p>	<p>We need to make sure that we get the best outcome for the school and there is no perceived favouritism. The procurement process helps us to do this.</p>
<p>Witnessing the receipt of a gift or benefit from a supplier.</p>	<p>We can't risk offending our suppliers.</p> <p>The gift was made out of goodwill.</p> <p>The value of the gift wasn't that great. It won't influence future decisions.</p> <p>It will help us to build a relationship with the supplier and we might get a better deal.</p> <p>The gift wasn't kept for personal use but was used by the school, so that's OK.</p>	<p>Accepting offers of gifts and benefits can give rise to a conflict of interest, lead to the perception of bias amongst our colleagues and call our objectivity and integrity into question.</p> <p>Accepting a gift, even if it's not valuable or shared with staff can create an expectation that the business or supplier will get something in return.</p> <p>If we consistently say 'thanks is enough' and apply the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality policy, our suppliers will get the message and understand the reasons.</p>	<p>I know it can be tricky but it's best to refuse an offer like that. It can create a conflict of interest and the supplier may expect something in return.</p>
<p>Finding that a school staff member is related to, or has an association with a supplier.</p>	<p>We know firsthand the product or service we're going to get.</p> <p>They're more likely to do a good job because of the relationship.</p> <p>This would not influence any decisions I make.</p>	<p>Even though it may not influence your decisions, there may be a perception of bias and favouritism towards the supplier engaged, as well as an expectation of future work.</p> <p>If the conflict of interest it declared and properly managed, then there may be no problem.</p>	<p>We must make sure that other suppliers feel that our procurement decisions are fair and unbiased and there is no perception of favouritism.</p>
<p>Finding that a school staff member has engaged school contractors for private work.</p>	<p>We should be able to use school contractors we know and can trust to do a good job.</p> <p>There aren't many suitable people who can do the work in our area.</p>	<p>We can't be seen to be favouring contractors.</p> <p>The perception may be, rightly or wrongly, that the private work was done for a cheap rate.</p> <p>There are many other providers out there that we can use, and they may be even cheaper and do a better job.</p>	<p>Hiring one of the school's contractors isn't in the interests of (staff member) or the school as (staff member) could be perceived as getting a discount.</p>

Identified ethical problem	Common reasons for not saying or doing anything	A different way to think about the problem
Respect		
Observing disrespectful behaviour or language towards fellow staff members.	<p>It's personality. I don't want to get involved and it's not my business.</p> <p>People are just stressed and they don't mean any harm.</p> <p>It's a one off that happened in the heat of the moment.</p>	<p>If we don't behave respectfully it could impact the culture of the school and how the students behave.</p> <p>If I don't speak up I am condoning this poor behaviour.</p> <p>This is contrary to our values.</p>
Information		
Witnessing improper use of confidential or private information.	<p>There may be a valid reason for sharing the information that I'm not aware of, or permission to share may have been granted. I will have difficulty proving this.</p> <p>The student or parents will never know that it's been shared.</p>	<p>Confidential information may be used for inappropriate purposes and could affect my colleagues and/or students and families. This could be a breach of privacy requirements. We need to ensure this doesn't happen or become the norm.</p> <p>How would I feel if this was my private information?</p> <p>If information was shared for a valid and authorised purpose, then there won't be an issue.</p>
Noticing that financial information has been modified or withheld from the School Council.	<p>I don't know enough about School Council business to be sure.</p> <p>I'll don't want to be seen as a trouble maker.</p> <p>Maybe they had valid reasons.</p>	<p>The School Council needs accurate and complete information to make ethical and evidence-based decisions. There could be very serious implications for the school, including our budget, if the information is not accurate.</p>
Being asked to change or omit data in school systems.	<p>If I don't do what I'm asked to, it will make my job impossible.</p> <p>Maybe there is a valid reason and the school and students will be better off.</p>	<p>Accurate data ensures we can make decisions in the best interest of the students.</p> <p>If it's uncovered, my employment and professional reputation, and public trust and confidence in the school will be impacted.</p>
Recruitment		
Seeing recruitment practices that are not merit-based or where there are conflicts of interest.	<p>Recruitment is time consuming and the position needs to be filled quickly.</p> <p>The (school leader) knows who the best person for the job is – better the devil you know.</p> <p>Professional networks are always used in recruitment; it's just how it works.</p>	<p>You don't know who is available and how good they are unless you follow a merit-based process. Following a merit-based process will reduce the risk of a successful grievance.</p> <p>Merit-based recruitment is fair and achieves the best outcomes for students and the school. If they are the best person, they will be successful in a merit-based process.</p> <p>We need to be seen as impartial to ensure community trust and confidence is maintained.</p>

Suggested Words that Work

It's important that we all talk to each other respectfully. Think about how this might affect the culture of the school and student behaviour.

Privacy breaches are serious and could have major consequences for the school, and for the individuals.

Are the school council members aware of this? They need all the relevant information to make the right decisions.

I'm not comfortable with this. There could be serious consequences for me and the school for modifying data, whatever the reason might be.

A competitive recruitment process will ensure we get the very best person at our school and reduce the risk of a successful grievance.

Identified ethical problem	Common reasons for not saying or doing anything	A different way to think about the problem
Employment/leave		
Becoming aware of outside employment of a staff member that is either undeclared, impacts on their school duties, or represents a conflict of interest.	<p>If the Principal knows then it must be OK.</p> <p>It's not my business.</p> <p>It's their own time – they should be able to do what they want.</p>	<p>Outside employment can impact their ability to do their job at school if it's not managed properly.</p> <p>It could also lead to a conflict of interest which could put the staff member or school at risk.</p> <p>How can I tell if the Principal knows? He/she can't take action if she doesn't know about it.</p> <p>I need to show leadership on this one by helping others to be accountable.</p>
Observing staff members undertaking work related to outside interests or outside employment, during school hours.	<p>They work long hours at school anyway.</p> <p>I think it's for the community so the school benefits.</p>	<p>While at work, we are at work. We get paid for doing our jobs, not to spend time on other interests. It's part of being accountable.</p> <p>This sets a bad precedent and is unfair on other staff.</p> <p>It may be noticed by the students or parents, which is not a good look for that staff member or our school.</p> <p>This could end up impacting student outcomes.</p>
Witnessing the false use of sick leave entitlements, or suspect fraudulent sick leave certificates.	<p>They have heaps of sick leave that they will never use anyway.</p> <p>It was only a one off I'm sure.</p> <p>It's too difficult to verify it's fraudulent.</p>	<p>Even though he/she has accrued sick leave, it is still a cost to the school.</p> <p>It will impact the work of other staff.</p> <p>Even if it doesn't make much difference, if it's accepted and everyone does it would have a significant impact on the school budget.</p>
Noticing that leave provisions have been manipulated to ensure holiday pay (e.g. returning just before the end of term).	<p>That's just the way it's always been done. Everybody does it.</p> <p>The cost is not that great.</p> <p>I know they have worked hard and contributed unpaid hours so they deserve it.</p>	<p>This adds to our staff costs and will impact our budget.</p> <p>If one person does it, others may think it's OK.</p>
Conflict of interest		
Finding that a staff member or school council member has improperly used their position to progress a private agenda.	<p>I don't have the hard evidence and I may not be believed.</p> <p>The outcome was the right one anyway, and the decisions would have been the same without interference.</p>	<p>This is a conflict of interest and puts the reputation of the school at risk. It can have an impact on how the school spends public money and undermine how the community trusts and values the school.</p>

Suggested Words that Work

The Department has a policy on outside employment to support us to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure our outside work doesn't impact on our job at school.

This is a misuse of school resources and means you have less time for students. It could undermine the school's reputation.

If sick leave is not used legitimately, it's a cost to our salary budget, which can impact funding for student programs. We don't want staff thinking that it's OK.

If we grant leave outside the provisions, it's an extra cost to our salary budget.

We must avoid using out public positions to progress our private interests. This can be a risk to our standing in the community, as well as to school funds.

Creating your own Words that Work

These five steps can help you prepare what you are going to say before approaching the person involved, and support your concern to be better understood and resolved.

1. Acknowledge the difficulty and offer to assist
2. Identify the risks or negative impacts
3. Appeal to higher value or common purpose (educational outcomes, DET's Values)
4. Offer a solution
5. Refer to policy.

For example:

Rebecca becomes aware that Adrian, the Sports Coordinator has been given two tickets to a National Premier League soccer match by the local sporting goods supplier.

“Adrian, it would be fantastic to attend the soccer match, but you should think about how accepting the tickets comes across. SportsLand is probably not aware of our policies, and may think that we’ll purchase equipment from them in the future. I know that they may be offended at first, but its best that you return the tickets. The school must remain impartial and we can’t be seen to benefit from our role at the school. I can send you a link to the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality guidelines.”

Rebecca:

- Acknowledged Adrian’s difficulties
- Explained the risks and potential negative impacts, including on the community (higher purpose)
- Offered a solution
- Referred to DET policy/guidelines.

She was also non-confrontational.

What if you can’t use ‘words that work’ or they don’t adequately address the issue?

In some situations, the best response may be to indicate that you are seeking information or clarification about the correct procedure or action to take. In other situations, resolving the issue directly may not be appropriate, particularly if it is a serious matter that needs to be reported.

For additional information or support:

- Contact your Region’s [Integrity Liaison Officer](#) for referrals and advice
- For finance related issues, refer to the relevant area of the [Schools Financial Manual](#) or contact your Region’s [School Finance Liaison Officer](#)
- For HR guidance contact [People Services](#) on 1800 641 943, or refer to [HRWeb](#)
- For advice around information privacy and specifically the use or sharing of personal information, contact the Privacy team on (03) 8688 7967 or privacy@edumail.vic.gov.au
- If your concern relates to a recruitment process, contact [Merit Protection Board](#) on (03) 9032 1701
- For Procurement related information contact the [Schools Procurement Branch](#) on schools.procurement@edumail.vic.gov.au
- For any concerns regarding misconduct, contact the Employee Conduct Branch on (03) 9637 2595 or employee.conduct@edumail.vic.gov.au
- To report serious concerns involving suspected fraud or corruption you can contact the [Speak up Service](#) on 1800 633 462 or email education.speakup@pfk.com.au or contact [IBAC](#), the [Victorian Ombudsman](#) or Victoria Police.