



Dear Chief

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak
COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I work at an insurance headquarters building and despite having my own cubicle, I’m packed in close with other employees. One certain female employee in a nearby cubicle always wears a strong smelling perfume that lingers in the air all day long, every day. This really irritates me and it gets worse when someone compliments her on it. I’ve hinted to her that her perfume has a strong smell but she reminds me that everyone likes it. How can I get her to tone it down without offending her?

TIRED OF THE SMELL



DEAR TIRED OF THE SMELL: I feel for you. There’s almost nothing worse than having to sit next to someone with body odor, someone who wears a strong scent of perfume or cologne, or even someone who smokes cigarettes all day long. No matter how hard you try to ignore it, the smell continually drifts into your nose. Even if the smell or scent doesn’t bother some people, you should not have to take in someone else’s smell, good or bad. Unless you’re okay with

Ease up on the perfume and cologne

rubbing Vick’s vapor rub in your nose to mask the smell, you’ll have to speak with someone about the matter or your work life will remain miserable.

First, I recommend you speak with the person causing you discomfort to see if you can gain cooperation to rectify the situation. Just be honest and display a positive attitude in your approach and maybe they will be considerate of your senses and change their habit.

If this doesn’t work, as in your case, you’ll need to speak with your or their supervisor about the issue. A good supervisor will bring the issue to the person’s attention without naming the complainant. One time I had to address a similar situation with a subordinate and I basically said: “Although your perfume has a nice scent, there are some employees with sensitive noses.” I didn’t tell her anyone complained and I didn’t even tell her to go lighter in application. She ended up switching to a lighter scented perfume and everyone lived happily ever after.

If a supervisor takes too long to rectify the situation, don’t hesitate to ask to be relocated to a different office space or cubicle until the problem is resolved.

If your request is denied, then you have to make a decision on how much you can tolerate. If you can’t tolerate it at all, you’ll have to elevate the issue to someone higher in the supervisory chain for possible action.

If the situation is never resolved and you don’t have any other kind of leverage (systemic or legal support), then you have to make a tough life decision and decide whether you want to seek employment elsewhere.

People should have enough pride in their dress and appearance to maintain a healthy state of grooming and cleanliness at work, but unfortunately some don’t. Either they don’t care or they weren’t raised to be conscientious enough about how they affect other people. Hopefully, though, you can resolve your situation without any repercussions. Good luck.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.