



Will you cover up for me?

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DEAR CHIEF: People at work keep asking me to cover up for them when they screw up. I always say no but am beginning to feel like an outcast as no one talks to me anymore. Is it normal for cover-ups to occur in organizations? What’s the best way to handle this?

THE OUTCAST



DEAR OUTCAST: The best way to handle this is to keep saying no! Don’t give in. Don’t cover up for anyone, ever, under any circumstances.

In this manner, you keep things simple. You don’t have to think about it. You don’t get sucked into ridiculous choices or decisions to make. When you, your coworkers, and your boss all know where you stand on the matter, you are above suspicion, trustworthy, reliable, and beyond reproach.

Covering up for others complicates things, making your life much more stressful. If you start covering up for people, which ones do you cover up for and which ones not? Close colleagues or anyone who asks? Do you only cover up small incidents or the big ones as well?

What happens when fraud or criminal negligence is involved? What do you do when you get found out? How do you explain it to your family and friends when you get fired? I’m sure you’d prefer to not have to answer these questions; however, see how complicated this all gets? In the end, it simply isn’t worth it.

When you make it known that you will not cover up for anyone, you do not have to explain yourself. In fact, if you tell people beforehand to not ask you to cover up, there’s a good chance they’ll leave you alone when they’re wandering around looking for a cover-up artist.

Saying no will probably cause some fallout as a few people may attempt to emotionally blackmail you or make you feel like you’re not part of their team. But don’t let it bother you because if they think so little of you to even ask you to do something of this nature, then they’re not really a good colleague or teammate anyway. Why would you want to risk your integrity, reputation, and job on someone like that?

In some organizations, cover-ups are common while in others, they’re not tolerated. Does your workplace have an ethics policy addressing behaviors associated with cover-ups? If so, perhaps

you can ask your boss or other trusted leader to enforce it. If not, maybe you can make a suggestion for the creation of such a policy.

At some point a leader or manager in your organization should address this behavior soon because when there is a lot of covering up, there is a lot of screwing up. And when there is a lot of screwing up, there is a need for remedial training and possibly some disciplining.

Regardless, if requests for cover-ups continue to happen, workmates keep alienating you for not accommodating them, and no one takes any action to address these behaviors, then you may have to begin looking for a new place to work--one where competency, integrity, and accountability are highly valued. Hopefully, though, in time your colleagues will adapt to your stance, stop asking you to cover up for them, and begin interacting with you again in a more positive way.



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.