

Employee Relations

One of a manager's or leader's primary objectives is to have positive working relationships with their employees and coworkers. In order to do that, it is essential to understand how to deal with different people in different situations. There are far too many different personality types to cover in a short workshop like this one. There are however some generalizations that can be used to make it easier to relate to your employees and coworkers.

Be aware of how people like to work and adapt your style accordingly.

Some people just like to work and be left alone. Others need to have constant praise and attention. As a manager or leader, you have to get to know your employees and understand how they prefer to work. If you have employees who work better on their own give them a little more freedom than others, provided of course that they continue to perform at a high level. By giving these people more space, you will have more time and resources to devote to those who need more attention. If you find that you have a team where all of the members fall into one category or the other it may be time to reconfigure the team.

Get to know the skills and abilities of the people that you work with.

Every employee has different skills and abilities. Sometimes these skills are not even related to the job that they are assigned to do. By getting to know the skills of the people on your team, you will be able to leverage all of your assets to produce a better result. This is also important because people who can use their skills and be recognized for them are often happier at work.

Understand how people think about problems.

Some of your employees will be very literal. They will need to have things explained to them in great detail and often. This type of person will generally be very poor at problem-solving. They will need to be put in positions where they do not need to make decisions or interpret policies. On the other hand, you may find that you have some employees who are very analytical and able to think critically about problems. These people will be able to solve problems, not necessarily quickly, and interpret instructions independently. Sometimes your analytical thinkers will overthink, so it is important to keep an eye on them so that they don't go too far.

Keep a positive attitude.

Your employees and coworkers will feed off of and reflect your attitude. By remaining positive, you help to create an overall positive culture in the organization. This means refraining from negative language, coaching rather than punishing, and not engaging in gossip.

Don't make everything a fight.

Understand that the workplace is not a win-lose situation. Strive to make every situation a win-win whenever possible. Try to refrain from encouraging and engaging in competitive

behavior. Exceptions can be made when you are using friendly competition to increase productivity but be sure to reward everyone who improves and not just the winner.

Be respectful and understanding.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of respect when you are talking to your employees and coworkers. Every person in your organization has value and should be respected for who they are. Managers and leaders should never make judgments about people based on their personal preferences. It is also important to be understanding of people's personal situations. If someone is having a hard time, try to find out why and work to accommodate them if you can. Stressed out employees don't do their best work, and if you can help to reduce their stress they will do better work. That being said, managers do have to hold people accountable for their performance. Being understanding of someone's hardship has to end when it starts to affect the team or the organization.

Be honest and upfront about issues.

Don't avoid conflict with your employees or coworkers. Conflict is inevitable. What you can do is to make your interactions positive and constructive. If someone has performance issues address them as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the less responsive people will be to your feedback. It is also important to address one issue at a time and never bring up old conflicts. If you do regular, formal performance evaluations always remember that nothing in the evaluation should be a surprise to the employee. If there were an issue it should have been addressed long before the formal evaluation.

Understand their motivation

Many managers and leaders assume that money is the main motivator for all employees. This is in fact far from the truth. While some employees may be motivated by raises and bonuses there are also many other factors that motivate. For some people, motivation is entirely internal. These people will do a good job regardless of the environment just because it gives them personal satisfaction. Recognizing their work and praising them in front of peers and superiors is usually a great way to enhance this motivation. External motivations other than money can include flexible work schedules, benefits, additional days off, a comfortable work environment, promotions, and many others. If you don't know what motivates your employees, don't be afraid to ask. Understanding and responding to each employee's motivating factors will create a much more productive workforce.

Feedback

Feedback is one of the most important types of communication with your employees. Feedback can be used to reinforce good behavior, correct bad behavior, and gather information. Feedback is an on-going, daily process of communicating with employees about what is going on in the workplace. Feedback is essential to create a culture of open, positive communication.

Positive Feedback

Positive feedback is used to reinforce those behaviors that we appreciate in employees. It is essentially a motivational tool and the cheapest reward you can give someone. By providing positive feedback, you are letting employees know that you appreciate them and at the same time you are providing a model for good behavior for other employees.

Have a good reason

One of the cardinal rules of positive feedback is to use it judiciously. Constant positive feedback for everyday tasks will eventually lose its meaning. Save your praise for those who have gone above and beyond what you have expected of them.

Be specific

Be clear about the behaviors that you want to reinforce. Don't just say 'good job'. This lets the employee know which behaviors have earned them respect and praise.

Know your audience

It is a very good idea to give positive feedback in public. This allows the person being praised to have pride in front of their peers and shows others what good behavior looks like. However, you should be aware that some people are uncomfortable with public praise and may be embarrassed by this.

Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback is used to correct behavior or highlight errors. It is important to think of this as a conversation about what is expected rather than a punishment for doing something wrong. Constructive feedback is a way to correct problems in a positive way that helps and the employee move forward rather than fighting about an issue.

Focus on the problem

When you are giving constructive feedback, make sure that you focus on the specific problem that is the current issue. Don't bring up past conversations or things that you haven't talked to the employee about. You also have to be very careful not to focus on the employee as a person but on the job tasks. Obviously you may have situations where the employee's personality is contributing to an issue. In that case, focus on how their behavior affects others.

Find the right time

There is no perfect time to have disciplinary conversations with people, but there are some guidelines for time and place that can make it easier. Whenever it is possible face-to-face conversations are best. Constructive feedback is most effective when a back and forth conversation can take place to resolve the issue. If you absolutely must give constructive feedback in writing choose your words very carefully to avoid accusations and negativity. Constructive feedback should never be given in public, and you should always meet in a place that is private and without interruptions. It is best to give feedback as soon as possible after something happens. This ensures that the situation is fresh and clear in everyone's mind. However it is also important to give yourself time to think about what you want to say and to have time to control any emotional reaction you may have had. Never give feedback when you are angry, annoyed, or stressed out about something.

Keep a record

Always keep notes about feedback conversations for future reference. These can be used as part of a review or for disciplinary purposes. Don't forget that this applies to positive feedback as well.

The Feedback Process

- State the reason you are giving the feedback
 - Use I statements and be specific
- Describe what you know about the situation
- Talk about the impact of their behavior
- Ask for and listen to their response
- Repeat their position to verify understanding
- Collaborate to find a solution
- Follow up

Managing negative response

All employees will respond to constructive feedback in different ways. Understanding the potential response and knowing how to manage it will help you control the conversation.

Hostility and Anger

It is common for people to feel angry when they are confronted about performance issues. This is the least productive response because the person who is angry automatically shuts down to any further communication. This reaction is emotional and difficult to control. The best thing to do in this situation is to calmly restate the problem, focusing on the issue not the person. If they are not able to respond in a calm way it may be that you will need to take a break from the conversation and schedule a time to continue it when everyone has had a chance to cool down.

Resistance and Denial

These responses occur when the person is not willing to take responsibility for their actions. They will often deflect the responsibility on someone else, deny that the events took place or downplay the impact of their behavior. Again it is best to restate the facts, letting them know that you know that the issues of responsibility or impact are not in question and that the behavior must be corrected.

Self-pity

This response most often manifests with employees saying 'I can't do anything right' or 'I just don't know what I am doing'. In this case, the employee is trying to avoid responsibility by making you feel sorry for them. Many people believe that if they cry or act hurt the manager will leave them alone. Sometimes this is a genuine response and sometimes it is not. If this happens in your conversation highlight the fact that this is a chance for them to improve and that you want to help them. Ask them if they need training and provide examples of ways they can do things better.

Indifference

Occasionally you will have an employee who just doesn't care that you are having a conversation with them. They will not engage in any problem solving or conversation. If this happens, call them out on it. Let them know that you feel that their lack of response is troubling and that you don't feel that they are fully committed to the process. Let them know that there will be consequences if they cannot commit to improvement.

Getting feedback

While it is very important for managers to give feedback to their employees, it is also important to get feedback from others. Encourage your employees and co-workers to give you feedback about how things are going and what you can improve. But remember not to take it personally if they say something you don't like.