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Building Respect Through Leadership



Showing respect at work isn't just the right thing to do, it's a smart business move. A respectful work environment boosts an organization's productivity, reputation, recruitment, retention, and effectiveness (in our case, serving the educational needs of our students). In contrast, a workplace that suffers from an ongoing lack of respect will certainly suffer in those areas. Employees who feel disrespected will get frustrated and spend time at work thinking about it and even talking about it, resulting in a toxic climate. Elevate the level of respect in your workplace by starting with your own actions. You'll find that demonstrating respectful behavior to your staff will encourage similar behavior from them and earn you more respect to boot. Read the tips below to find out how your actions as a supervisor can help you show respect and receive it in return.

- **Be respectful when giving direction to your staff.** Although the chain of command should compel your employees to follow your requests, no one wants to be gruffly ordered around. Some employees may naturally resent being told what to do, so it can be difficult to provide work direction while at the same time gaining respect. One way to achieve this is by, whenever possible, giving employees some latitude on how they achieve tasks or goals. Allowing them to use their own discretion will give them a sense of control and ownership over their work and more importantly the results.
- **Show that you see situations from other people's points of view before you expect them to see it from yours.** This can be as easy as making a simple statement up front that acknowledges the other person's circumstances before explaining your needs. Once you've established that you have empathy for their situation, it makes them more willing to empathize with yours.
- **Keep in mind that "respect" may mean different things to people of different cultures.** It's good form to follow the golden rule, which tells us to treat others as you would like to be treated. However, we all have different needs, viewpoints, and values. Perhaps behavior that works for you would seem disrespectful to them. Though we are not mind readers, people often give verbal and nonverbal signals as to how they feel about interactions. Keep an open mind and respect others' differences. Remember that other people perceive behavior differently from you.

MEMBERS OF THE PERSONNEL COMMISSION

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- **Communicate expectations regularly so that everyone's on the same page.** Because your employees' definition of respect may differ, it's imperative that everyone understands what's expected of them. If you witness recurring disrespectful behavior, speak up and set guidelines so it's clear to your staff that the conduct is not acceptable.
- **Give people the benefit of the doubt.** Making assumptions in the workplace is a quick way to generate feelings of disrespect. Supervisors who are constantly critical, suspicious, or micromanaging are, sometimes inadvertently, communicating mistrust and lack of respect to their staff. Make an effort to express concern rather than judgment when an employee looks frazzled or drained.
- **Don't play favorites.** You must treat every employee fairly and equally to maintain a workplace based on respect. Resist the inclination to pigeonhole employees or give them secret nicknames. We all have our differences. It can be human nature to label others based on cursory beliefs about them, but those beliefs are often wrong. Strive to bring out the best in people instead of just complaining about the worst. You need to mentally accept that every employee has the opportunity to grow and shine, otherwise you may miss it when it happens. Even worse, your mindset may end up contributing to what's holding them back.
- **As a supervisor, don't tolerate clearly inappropriate behavior.** Allowing an employee to act disrespectfully without bringing forth any consequences will breed resentment in the rest of your staff. Bring the offending behavior to the employee's attention; they have to be aware of it before they can correct it. Help the employee develop a plan to adjust his/her behavior. As with all disciplinary issues, document ongoing problems that can't be resolved with a simple verbal warning.
- **Choose your words wisely when resolving conflicts.** Using profanity can undoubtedly escalate already tense situations, but so can using loaded words that draw conclusions about behavior or its motivation, such as "unprofessional," "incompetent," or "selfish." Instead stick to precise descriptive words, like "cluttered," "noisy," or "abrupt."
- **Discipline employees without being condescending.** There's no need to be overly negative to employees when they've made a mistake. Belittling or shouting at employees will not encourage them to change their behavior. Always treat your employees with respect and dignity, even when taking disciplinary action. The chances of them turning around will increase if you treat them like an adult rather than a wayward child.
- **Provide more praise than criticism to employees.** Don't be one of those supervisors who only sees their role as that of the disciplinarian. While giving constructive criticism is an important and necessary part of being a supervisor, you must also ensure that you're providing positive feedback to reinforce good behavior. Instead of placing all your focus on what you don't want your staff to do, try shifting your focus towards what you want to see more of.
- **Don't be a ROAD warrior.** Supervisors who have gone ROAD (Retired on Active Duty, a military term that's becoming more and more relevant in today's workplace) are communicating the highest level of disrespect, even if unintentionally. When you have checked out of work while still collecting your paycheck, you're not providing your staff with the support, planning, and training they need to succeed. There's no greater sign of disrespect to your employees than behaving like you just don't care.

Leading by example is a cornerstone of strong leadership. By modeling respectful behavior to your staff, you'll set the tone for how you expect your employees to treat each other. Moreover, building trust and strong working relationships will earn you added respect as a result.

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