

Dealing with Personnel Challenges

Workplace Challenges

We are going to discuss:

- Workplace challenges employees may face in their careers and how you as an upcoming leader can assist and provide insight with how to deal with them.

New to the Workplace, Department, University

Figuring out how to be part of a new work culture can at times be frustrating for new employees, whether they have worked at WSU for a while or are a new employee. New colleagues need to get to know their coworkers and seasoned employees need to welcome new colleagues.

- What do you do or have your done to welcome a new colleagues?
- Within your organization, what type of projects or activities could you have the entire team work on to enhance collegiality and to welcome a new team member?
- What advice or recommendations would you discuss with a new staff member?

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Making Mistakes

How many of you have worked with someone who made a mistake and did not take ownership?

What did that do to the office morale or your relationship with the coworker?

Situation:

You lead a Fiscal Technician (FT) who is responsible for processing travel and temporary payroll for a busy office. You did not supervise the FT during her first 6 months of employment and she has now been working in the department for about 9 months. You have recently been assigned her supervisor. The Office Manager met with you and the FT, letting her know that no paperwork is to be given to the Chair for signature until you have reviewed and initialed it approved. The FT is not happy that you are reviewing and initially the documents because the previous supervisor did not review her work. Initially you explain that you are reviewing as a way to better learn the FT roles, understand the travel needs of the faculty and staff. Initially, you are given the documents to review and you regularly mark a large amount of mistakes. You have conversations with her on the importance of spelling names correctly and verifying the accuracy of the numbers. You hope by writing the corrections on the travel forms she will start proofing her work better.

The Chair stops to see you on Monday afternoon and brings back a stack of travel documents that contain a number of mistakes. First you are shocked that the Chair was given them prior to your review/approval and then you notice all the mistakes. You immediately notice that John Smith's name is written Jonh Smithe and he traveled to Chicago, MN.

What do you say to the Chair?

How would you address this with the FT employee?

Would you meet with her first or discuss with your manager first?

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Problems with Coworkers

Conflict does not always have to be negative. When employees are able to challenge one another's ideas in a supportive environment, new ideas are generated and fostered. It is important to remember that conflict will always exist between employees. Effective supervisors have the skills to manage the conflict process and turn disagreements into ideas.

- **Conflict arises because employees:**
 - > Have different points of view.
 - > Communicate to one another differently.
 - > Spend large amounts of time together.
 - > Depend on one another to "get the job done".
 - > Have different productivity or lack of

Healthy Conflict

- Disagreements that are communicated in a supportive environment that foster the generation of new ideas or ways to problem solve.
- Tension that increases awareness or sheds light on a growing workplace problem.

Unhealthy - Damaging Conflict

- Name Calling.
- Personal Attacks.
- Silent and Withdrawn, afraid to speak up
- Cliques, gossip and rumors.
- Lack of Mutual Respect.

What are some other reasons conflict occurs between coworkers?

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For the following list of work / personality trait, please discuss within your group how you would address each situation:

Poor Work Habits: "Slackers": A coworker's poor work habits are affecting the units' job performance and lowering the productivity. This is affecting your ability to get your job done in a timely manner and he has started asking you to help when he falls behind.

- 1) Consider how you handle the situation as a coworker?
- 2) Consider how you handle the situation if you are the supervisor and the other employee comes to you in frustration?

Coworker is very critical: You work with a long-term employee who is critical of all of your work, especially when you bring up new ideas or do not perform a task as they would. They create an unpleasant work situation. Often it is difficult to avoid them, but it is important to be pleasant when you have to work with them, and appropriately stand up to them when necessary. When you decide to address the situation, do not engage in an argument; it is best to talk with them calmly, in private, about how their behavior makes you feel.

- 1) How would you initiate the conversation?

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Group Review

In your groups review the following personalities that have caused a conflict within the office, decide with each one whether it personally affected you, another coworker, or the entire team.

- 1) Who did the person affect?
- 2) How would you suggest addressing the personality?
- 3) Would you suggest different approaches depending on who was affected?

Whiners and Complainers: They tend to see the negative side to everything. This attitude can be harmful to morale. Complaining may be their attempt to avoid conflict, relieve stress about things they feel they have no control over, or simply to get attention.

Saboteurs and Take Credit for others Work: They cause distrust by spreading rumors or withholding important information from those they see as rivals. This can affect others career goals and reputation.

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Gossip in the Workplace:

Damages trust, productivity, morale and engagement. Employees can feel anxiety and stress. It can cause misunderstandings and eventually can increase turnover rates as employees become frustrated. Malicious gossip can lead to formal complaints and corrective / disciplinary actions.

E-mail communications can be a way of spreading gossip. Employees often communicate in email as if they were “talking” to a coworker. Emails can also be forwarded to unintended recipients.

Is this gossip?

Jill learns from Lisa that Samantha and Richard are getting married. Jill proceeds to tell several coworkers in the office before Samantha and Richard have announced the news to family or publically.

Is this gossip?

Joe leaves a meeting with Pam in Travel and tells his coworkers that Pam is expecting another baby.

Is this gossip?

Mary, the department fiscal technician, tells coworkers that the President is going to implement a hiring freeze and the budget is in bad shape. She says that next there will be salary reductions.

Why is gossip common in the workplace?

How would you address the situation if the office has one gossiper?

How would you address if it is a group of employees participating?

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WSU Bullying Prevention and Reporting Policy (BPPM 50.31)

- Workplace bullying refers to *repeated*, unreasonable actions of individuals (or a group) directed towards an employee (or a group of employees), which intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine; or which create a risk to the health or safety of the employee(s).
- Workplace bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying behavior creates feelings of defenselessness and injustice in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work.

Sign(s) to watch for and take action:

- Excessive criticism (appears different standards)
- Belittling a person's opinion
- Keeping a file of mistakes or falsely accusing
- Yelling, insulting, humiliating, or using profanity
- Socially singling out
- Spreading destructive gossip and lies
 - Failing to stop the spread of rumors
- Work sabotage (not performing tasks crucial to another's success)
- Habit of taking the credit for work of others
- Blocking ability for training, vacation, or promotion

Bullying and Harassing Behavior – Is Not:

- Expressing differences of opinion
- Offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice about work-related behavior
- Reasonable action taken by a supervisor relating to the management of an office

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The goal of reporting bullying complaints to a supervisor is to resolve the issue at the lowest level and as quickly as possible.

Informal Complaint Option(s):

- Meet with a supervisor and seek advice on addressing concern.
- Request a supervisor intervene on the employees behalf.
- Request an informal meeting with the alleged offender and your supervisor or the alleged offender's supervisor to discuss the concerns.

What can you do:

- Call the person out.
- Encourage coworkers to report incidents.
- If you are in a lead or senior role, be a resource to your employees.
- Seek assistance from a manager.
- Actively participate in an informal resolution process. Resolve the issues at the lowest level and with the least amount of disruption to work place.
- Contact HRS for guidance.

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Two of your coworkers dislike each other.

They have started coming to you and are “telling” on the other. You are spending a lot of time dealing with them both. Until recently, the coworkers have not involved other team members, but you have become aware people are taking sides, not focusing on work, and spending time gossiping.

The following are a few outcomes to resolving the conflict:

- Both parties work out their differences, rise above, and move on.
- Both parties agree to disagree, but get past it and move on.
- Both parties say they’ve moved on, but one or both secretly harbors continued ill will. Negativity lurks and performance soon begins to dip.
- One party sucks it up and reluctantly moves on, while the other seemingly “wins.” Conflict continues.
- The situation damages both workers and both leave.

What can you do?

- Meet with the feuding coworkers to see if you can remedy the situation.
- Alert your Manager to the situation so that they’re not blindsided.
- Involve HRS as necessary.
- Advocate an environment of respect, tolerance, and civility in the office.
- Maintain an open dialogue with your employees.

Employees do not need to be friends or necessarily like each other; but they do need to treat each other professionally and with respect.

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Tardiness in the Workplace

Many employees struggle with punctuality in the workplace. For most offices, an occasional instance will not cause a need for addressing the delay. However, repeated days or a pattern of tardiness can cause real concerns within the office. Even with the occasional instance, as a supervisor you need to be clear with expectations and responsibilities.

Steps to address concerns:

- 1) Meet with employee in a private area;
- 2) Give the employee a copy of their work schedule
- 3) Remind employee of appropriate call-in procedures
- 4) Remind employee of the importance of arriving to work on time

You recently had a staff meeting and handed out the department expectations which addresses office hours and call-in procedures of calling in prior to the start of the shift if they are going to be late. Two days later, Bob arrives 8 minutes late for work.

Do you address the 8 minute tardiness?

Would you address if Bob failed to call-in to tell you he was going to be late?

Would you address if Bob was late more than 15 minutes?

What if Bob's position is the main point of contact for the office, is responsible for opening the office door, and students were forming a line to seek assistance from him?

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Summary

Address concerns early
Meet individually with staff
Allow staff to talk and do not interrupt
Listen to staff, but get the facts
Seek assistance and guidance from supervisors
Contact HRS