

Successful Supervisor Part 60

Tips to Keep Employees from Driving Each Other Crazy

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

It is a peculiarity of human beings that when people work in close proximity to each other, they eventually find ways to drive each other crazy. It is often the little things that begin to annoy others, and the irritation grows over time until there is an eventual altercation. This problem does not surface in every instance, but it is so common that supervisors need a kind of tool kit of ways to coach people so they stay out of open conflict.

In this article I will share twelve of my favorite methods of preventing interpersonal conflict from becoming a problem among coworkers. These ideas are also part of a video series I made on the topic entitled “Surviving the Corporate Jungle.” Here is a [link](#) where you can view three sample videos (just 3 minutes each) from the series of 30 videos.

Ideas You Can Teach Your Employees

Here are 12 simple ideas that can reduce the conflict between people and provide a more pleasant work environment:

1. **Reverse Roles** – When people take opposing sides in an argument, they become blind to the alternate way of thinking. This polarization causes people to become intransigent, and the rancor escalates. A simple fix is to get each party to verbalize the points being made by the other person. To accomplish this, each person must truly understand the other person’s perspective, which is why the technique is effective.
2. **Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff** – Most of the things that drive you crazy about a co-worker are things that you won’t remember by the end of the day or certainly not later in the week. Recognize that the things annoying you about another person are really insignificant when considering the bigger picture and the numerous things both of you have in common.

3. **Live and Let Live** – The other person’s personal habits are just the way he or she is built. Don’t fixate on trying to change the person to conform to what you think should happen. Focus your attention on the things you like.
4. **Take a Vacation** – When pressure builds up, just take a brief vacation in your mind. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and visualize a happier place and time. You can take a vicarious trip to the beach anytime you wish. One trick with this technique is to get as many senses involved as possible; feel the warm air on your cheek, taste the salt water on your lips, hear the gentle lapping of the waves, smell the seaweed by your feet, touch the warm sand on which you are sitting, see the beautiful sunset over the water.
5. **Be Nice** – Kindness begets kindness. Share a treat, say something soothing, compliment the other person, do something helpful. These things make it more difficult for the ill feelings to spread.
6. **Extend Trust** – Ernest Hemingway said, “The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.” We’ll forgive the flawed grammar, since Ernest is already in the grave, and also since his meaning is powerfully true. Trust is bilateral, and you can usually increase trust by extending more of it to others. I call this “The First Law of Trust.”
7. **Don’t Talk Behind their Back** – When you spread gossip about people, a little of it eventually leaks back to them, and it will destroy the relationship. If there is an issue, handle it directly, just as you would have that person do with you.
8. **Don’t Regress to Childish Behavior** – It is easy for adults in the work setting to act like children. You can witness it every day. Get off the playground, and remember to act like an adult. Work is not a place to have tantrums, sulk, pout, have a food fight, undermine, or any number of common tactics used by people who are short on coping mechanisms because of their immaturity.
9. **Care About the Person** – It is hard to be upset with someone you really care about. Recognize that the load other people carry is equal or heavier than your own. Show empathy and try to help them in every way possible. This mindset is the route to real gratitude.
10. **Listen More Than You Speak** – When you are talking or otherwise expounding, it is impossible to be sensitive to the feelings of the other person. Take the time to listen to the other person. Practice reflective listening and keep the ratio of talking to listening well below 50%.
11. **Create Your Development Plan** – Most individuals have a long list of what other people need to do to shape up but a rather short list of the things they need to improve upon. Make sure you identify the things in your own behavior that need to change, and you will take the focus off the shortcomings of others.
12. **Follow the Golden Rule** – The famous Golden Rule will cure most strife in any organization. We tend to forget to apply it to our everyday battles at work.

If you teach employees to follow these 12 simple rules, there would be a lot less conflict in the work place. It takes some effort, but it is really worth it because we spend so much time working with other people.

Following these rules also means leading by example. If just a few people in an organization model these ideas, other people will see the impact and start to abide by them as well. A big part of your role as a supervisor is to model good interpersonal behavior. That initiative can form a trend that will change an entire culture in a short period of time.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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