

# Supervisor's Role In a Respectful Workplace



**D**on't be fooled – it isn't the economy or stress, and it isn't "just the nature of the business."

If backbiting, name-calling, gossip, and general nastiness are the norm where you work, then you've got yourself a respect problem – one that you need to get a handle on yesterday, if not sooner.

## Don't Excuse Bad Behavior

Few things buy trouble like excusing bad behavior. Left unchecked, disrespectful interactions feed on themselves, growing into a culture of personal conflict and simmering resentment that will eventually undermine your mission. No one wants to work in this environment, and your best employees won't. They'll leave and you'll be stuck with the mess.

## Model Respect on the Job

Respect is an institutional mind-set that must be promoted and practiced from the top down. As a manager, you're on the frontlines in this struggle, and though it can be daunting, you have more influence and control than you might believe.

Your employees take a lot of their behavioral cues from you, but without a developed sense of self-awareness, you won't be able to see what they're seeing.

## Try This Exercise

Dedicate the next week to stepping outside of yourself and observing your daily interactions. Be mindful of both your words and your body language. Are you polite and patient or surly and brusque? How do you respond to let-downs or unexpected bad news?

## Promote a Respectful Workplace

No one is perfect, but being conscientious of how your behavior is amplified within the culture will help you to start modeling the kind of behavior you'd like your employees to demonstrate. Here are things you can do to promote a respectful work environment.

## Some Dos

- Greet employees every day.
- Express genuine concern for their interests and well-being.
- Listen and make eye contact when spoken to.
- Compliment publicly.
- Recognize individual strengths, weaknesses, and points of view.

## Some Don'ts

- Pile on work or criticism as soon as employees walk in the door.
- Treat employees as faceless, interchangeable cogs.
- Interrupt or raise objections until someone is finished speaking.
- Criticize publicly unless absolutely necessary.
- Make a reprimand or criticism personal.

## Reinforcing Boundaries

Changing your culture requires sending a clear signal that disrespectful behavior won't be tolerated. This means putting a stop to gossip, name-calling, rudeness, and tagging others with unflattering nicknames. If you hear it or see it, intervene immediately with an unmistakable verbal reprimand like, "That's unnecessary and not appreciated in this workplace."

## Working Through Conflict

This does not mean that everyone has to agree or that conflict can't exist – it can and should. Part of your role is creating an environment where employees can work through conflict in a professional manner. The more skillfully and patiently you are able to mediate, the more you'll train your employees to attack problems, not people.

## Understand Employer Liability

Always take a proactive approach to eliminating workplace bullying. Employer liability isn't limited to cases of sexual harassment. Any established pattern of harassment can put you or your employer at risk unless you can demonstrate reasonable care in preventing it. In recent years, bullying has overtaken sexual harassment as a more frequently experienced problem among employees. Thirteen states are currently considering laws to address the problem of bullying in the workplace.

Each employee should be given a copy of your harassment policy along with an appropriate avenue for complaints and resolutions. Work closely with your HR department, and be sure that you're in compliance with internal procedures. Your diligence will almost certainly prevent headaches down the road. ■