



Supervisors Confronting Employees: What Works?

Supervisors dread confronting employees.

It's often easier to drop hints and make indirect threats rather than initiate a face-to-face, fish-or-cut-bait conversation with an individual who must shape up.

Constructive confrontation works best when supervisors organize their thoughts in advance, and if you are an employee assistance provider or HR manager, you can help by sharing the following tips:

In the days before you meet with an employee whose behavior or performance is unacceptable, map out what to say so that you follow a clear, logical framework.



Take three steps to plan a successful confrontation:

1. Summarize the situation from the employee's point of view. This is critical in order to be effective. Reflect on what the worker has said to you about the issue at hand. Recall specific phrases, examples and arguments you've heard from the employee.

Here is how to do it: Start your meeting by saying, "As you know, we've spoken many times about the issue of your [tardiness/poor attitude/etc.]. You've told me that [summarize what employee has said]."

2. Ask for confirmation. After you summarize the employee's past comments as they relate to the key issue, ask a neutrally worded question to confirm that you've captured his or her views accurately. Examples: "Does that sound accurate?", "Did I represent what you've said correctly?", "Am I leaving anything out that you'd like to add?"

3. Dignify the employee's views—and tie them to the core issue. After the employee confirms your summary, recognize the individual's right to adopt that perspective. You don't have to praise it, of course. But conveying your understanding of the employee's position in one simple, affirmative sentence ratchets down tension.

Now, you're ready to confront the employee. Simply discuss and connect what the employee believes to what you believe must happen next. Anticipate a much smoother discussion that you may have experienced in the past.

HERE'S A COOL TIP: A supervisor should use a "Help Me Understand" statement to set a positive, non-threatening tone. Examples: "Susan, help me understand what it means when you say you won't fight with your coworkers and then you engage in a series of verbal shouting within a week" or "Help me understand what to conclude when you commit to telling the truth about filing your activity reports and then we identify serious discrepancies."