
The Mathis Group's

Messenger

Vol. 1 No. 10

December, 2003

Five Rules for Disciplining Peers or Friends

By Dr. Keith Mathis

One of the most difficult situations with which supervisors must deal is confronting peers or friends about behavior in the workplace. It is not uncommon for peers to be employees with whom we have worked for years. This situation is complicated if in the past they have heard us make derogatory comments about the company or others workers.

Our success as supervisors depends on the fairness we demonstrate in handling all employees regardless of friendships or long-standing work relationships. It is sad but not surprising that some supervisors fail to do this.

Some will slant jobs and assignments to friends or make decisions that benefit only their peers. Other supervisors have allowed their peers and friends to become a select group that functions by a different set of rules. In order for a leader to gain employee buy-in and to be successful, the rules must be the same for every employee.

The following five rules will guide you in leading your peers and friends.

1. DON'T LET THE BEHAVIOR GO UNNOTICED

Our behavior in disciplining peers and friends should be no different than regular employees. We may feel strange approaching them, but we must do it for the good of all concerned.

Confront the bad performance quickly

The longer the behavior continues the harder it will be to change. Employees whose behavior is not corrected will eventually feel entitled to carry on in the fashion to which they have become accustomed.. They justify this because the supervisory staff has seen and heard it in the past, but they have said or done nothing. As you can see, the supervisor's lack of initiative in this situation actually encourages the worker's unacceptable performance.

Guard against manipulation from peers or friends

Peers and friends can easily manipulate the conversation by bringing up incidents from the past. They may even be able to quote you on statements you made that justify their present actions.

Leaders who have been quoted feel two-faced and uncomfortable confronting friends on issues they once spoke against. Regardless of what has happen in the past, today is a new day, and you must exercise your responsibility as a leader. Seize the moment!

2. EXPLAIN THAT YOU WILL NOT SHOW FAVORITISM

If the peer or friend is trying to manipulate you or get you to show favoritism you must take a stand. Taking a stand early will reduce further problems.

Focus on equal treatment for all

Friends think your indulgence of their behavior is not favoritism but a perk or something you owe them. When you allow certain employees to have special privileges, you are unwittingly creating a dynamics that will reduce motivation and decrease morale among other employees. Showing favoritism is unmistakably wrong!

Give information and communicate openly to all employees

Friends or peers often try to induce us to give them information before others have access to it. We must constantly guard against this. This is particularly dangerous when major decisions are coming down the pipeline.

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*Peer pressure is a great thing
when it helps you accomplish
your goals instead of
distracting you from them.*

Po Bronson

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In order to avoid giving in to their pressure, ask yourself the following questions, "Is what they are asking normal and legitimate?" "Is my response normal?" "Is it the way I would answer any other employee?" If your answer to any of these questions is "no," don't do it.

3. APPEAL TO THEIR PROFESSIONALISM

Friends often do not want to be treated in a professional manner. Rather, they want a loophole that allows them to do as they please.

They sometimes desire special rules or privileges. For instance, they might want to go home early or come in late without penalties. They might even want to have a lower productivity level than other co-workers. Policies and procedures, as well as performance levels must be uniform. If they are changed for a select group then you actually reduced their importance for all the employees.

4. SEEK INPUT FROM OTHER SUPERVISORS

Draw insight and counsel from other more experienced people. They may be able to give you a better perspective from which to approach the situation. Discuss with them ways they have used discipline with certain types of problem employees and what was successful.

Don't hesitate to discuss this situation with your manager or with people in human resources. It is better to seek counsel before disciplining an employee than to make a mistake and be forced to back track.

5. HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE LIKE ANYONE ELSE

Don't have two sets of standards

You cannot afford to have two sets of standards, one for friends and another for all other employees. If you do this, you are guilty of discrimination.

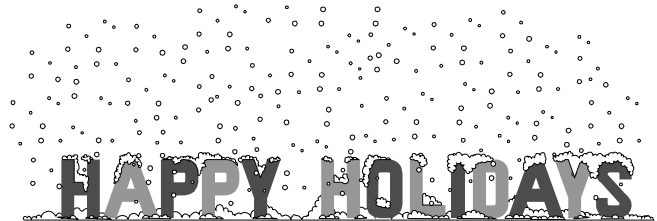
Our integrity hinges on how we treat every employee. People are watching, and, if only for the sake of our influence and reputation, we must not discriminate or grant special privileges. All employees that report to you must be measured by and held to the same impartial standards.

Discuss standards, performance, and behaviors, not friendships

When you are attempting to establish performance standards among your friends, you may find that they want to be allowed to function in a casual manner. If they should say as much, backtrack and restate the performance standard that is being

brought to their attention. Point out specific behaviors that need to be changed and give them ways to make the change.

Do not give in to their pressure to weaken your position. If your experience is like that of many other leaders in a similar position, you can expect some of your friends to call you names, to make derogatory comments, or to refuse to talk. Each of these ploys is a various way of attempting to manipulate you so they get their way. Keep focusing on performance or behavior, not friendships as you speak with them.



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