

4. *Mediate when challenging employees have conflict with other staff in the unit:*

Supervisors may need to take on the role of *mediator* managing interpersonal conflict within the unit. Supervisors can engage both parties in a dialogue using strengths-based questions such as:

1. What are some of the things you appreciate about each other? (Ask them to be specific; keep asking for more areas of appreciation.)
2. What is the common goal you have in this situation? (Supervisors may need to discuss values underlying the situation to find commonality.) What are your concerns about this situation?
3. How would it benefit each of you to reach that common goal? (“What’s In It for Me?”)
4. What could each of you do, from your perspective, to move closer to the goal? (Encourage several steps for each person.)

5. *Consider how challengers actually do contribute*

- They’re willing to disagree with the leader or higher authority, and encourage the team to take well-conceived risks
- Other members appreciate their candor and openness
- They’re described as honest, outspoken, principled, ethical, and adventurous
- They provides question-oriented reappraisal of decisions

6. *Help unit members appreciate the value of diversity*

There is diversity in team player work styles and communication styles. Supervisors can work with their staff to develop needed styles within the team and help staff learn to flex their styles as needed.

7. *Ask other agency personnel to help you engage a challenging member*

Supervisors can do this by framing the problem behavior in a strengths-based, forward focus for improvement. They can acknowledge the challenging member’s contribution to previous successes and ask him/her how to build on what s/he did.

8. *Use strengths-based performance evaluation with challenging staff*

- Use the evaluation checklist and recognize where they are meeting and/or exceeding job task expectations
- Give strengths-based feedback to workers about their performance and behavior in relationship to job expectations.
- Ask strengths-based questions to identify organizational or personal barriers to their performance and appropriate behavior

9. *Give strengths-based feedback about workers’challenging behavior*

- Give *evaluative feedback* after observing the worker’s challenging behavior:
“Jane, I observed you rolling your eyes when Mr. Smith was talking to you.” (addresses a performance the supervisor wants to correct)
- Give *developmental feedback* after giving *evaluative feedback* about behavior the supervisor has observed that should continue, and/or behavior the supervisor wants the worker to do differently.
“Jane, please use effective nonverbal communication skills when talking to clients. I observed you rolling your eyes in disagreement as Mr. Smith was talking. This may communicate to Mr. Smith that you don’t believe him or don’t value his statements. Please show your interest in, and your value for Mr. Smith by making intermittent eye contact as he is speaking.”

10. *Manage Resistance*

Often, if will not help for supervisors to offer logical explanations and proposed solutions to problems. Supervisors must address the feelings, not the thinking.

The following three-step process addresses feelings associated with resistance:

- a. Identify the form the resistance is taking. The form of the resistance will be evident in the worker’s behavior. For example, the worker may flood the conversation with reasons why s/he could not do the work to the established standard. Supervisors need to listen to the words and to the underlying message, “I am angry at being called on the carpet,” or “You don’t understand my situation.”
- b. State in a neutral, non-punitive way the form the resistance is taking. Supervisors should then focus on the feelings of the worker, not the content. “You seem angry (or frustrated), tell me why.”
- c. Remain silent. Let the worker respond to the statement. This gives the worker an opportunity to express their concerns or feelings. For example, “I’m afraid you’re going to blame me for this,” or “This case is so complicated, I’m angry you haven’t helped me with it.”

Once supervisors understand the reason for the resistance and their workers can express their feelings, supervisors can acknowledge and deal with it. Supervisors should remember that the defensiveness and resistance do not necessarily imply a personal attack on them.

11. Influence and motivate challenging employees

- Ask what they need to be more satisfied employees, motivated to be productive in the team. Workers must be comfortable in the work environment, feel safe and secure, feel acceptance as an integral part of the work team, and feel themselves *and* hear from others that they makes valid contributions to the work of the unit and agency.
- Provide feedback for it is much like a reward. It has the potential to motivate if done properly, with more positives than negatives.
- Offer strengths-based supervision and promote learning environments. Both provide opportunities for workers to experiment with new ideas under appropriate circumstances, and to feel a personal sense of growth and accomplishment as a result.
- Use your influence. Supervisors can most readily influence challenging performers who are able and unwilling if they perceive the leader has the ability to reward and give consequences. To a lesser extent, workers are also influenced when supervisors by their connection influence and have the ability to reward. Workers are least affected by expert influence.
- Demonstrate respect. Supervisors who have developed strong negative feelings about their challenging staff will likely be ineffective in influencing them to perform. Supervisors must first rebuild their relationship with their workers to the point where both persons can demonstrate mutual respect.
- Develop your influence. Challenging performers may also be influenced by supervisors they perceive having valuable information or access to it. Supervisors' development in this area often provides sufficient information to influence others.

In summary, supervisors want and need "Competent, Confident and Committed" workers in their units. Challenging employees may be competent and/or confident; applying these strategies may go a long way in helping challenging employees become more committed.

References

Senge, Peter (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Currency Doubleday, New York.

Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). *Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition— Leading Human Resources (8th edition)*. 2000, New Jersey/Prentice Hall .

Oakely, Ed.(1994). *Enlightened Leadership: Getting to the Heart of Change*. A Fireside Book