

Friendly Supervising

As a supervisor, do you look the other way when some employees break the rules but not when others violate the same policies? Do some employees always get a shot at earning overtime while others never do? Are you friends with some of your employees but not others? Are they your Facebook friends? If so, this issue of **Frontline Supervision** will explain why being a BFF with your employees can be problematic. Also, we'll provide tips on how to develop positive working relationships with employees that are based on trust and respect.

If the Shoe Fits

Whether you're a new supervisor or an old hand at managing workers, it's still easy to become too friendly with your employees. Let's face it, some of them – or if you're lucky, all of them – are really great people. In fact, they're exactly the kind of people you like to be friends with. That's no surprise, really, since we tend to hire people we think we can get along with and that will "fit" into the organization. There is a fine line, however, between being a good fit and being too chummy, and that line is often crossed on a Facebook page.

Friendly Fire

Social networking is a great way for busy friends and family to keep in touch with one another, and many consider Facebook to be the very best of the social media genre. From an employer's standpoint, though, supervisor/employee Facebook friendships can lead to legal complications. In October 2010, the National Labor Relations Board filed a complaint against an employer that fired an employee because of her Facebook posts, thereby allegedly violating the National Labor Relations Act.

In another recent incident, a small-business owner may have crossed the line when she made Facebook comments about an employee who was complaining that her supervisor had harassed her.

The situation might have been avoided had the employee not had access to the supervisor's Facebook page. Similarly, other employees would not have been able to fuel the fire with their own comments if they had not been friends with the boss. This certainly supports the importance of employer policies that discourage supervisors from being Facebook friends with their direct reports.



But, what if you're a new supervisor with lots of former coworkers who are also your Facebook friends? It may sound harsh, but you may need to "unfriend" them. It may be a difficult task, but you really have to let them know that you can no longer be friends in the same way that you were before. Your employees may not like it, but they will understand and respect you for it. Before you have that conversation, though, consult with your HR department for guidance.

Playing Favorites

Supervisors rely on employees to get the job done, and new supervisors, naturally, tend to rely on those with whom they've had a good relationship –

Tip

Make sure your employees know that on a social network not hosted by the company (like Facebook), they don't have to accept "friend" requests from other employees.



Do Unto Others ...

One of the best ways to reduce the potential for problems with employees is to ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Do I clearly communicate expectations for behavior and job performance to all employees?
- ◆ Do I listen to all employee concerns and address them in a responsible and effective manner?
- ◆ Do I make sure that all employees receive their benefits?
- ◆ Do I make sure that all employees are paid accurately for the work they perform?
- ◆ Do I make sure that all employees receive the training they need to be successful?
- ◆ Do I work with HR to conduct thorough investigations into issues as they arise?
- ◆ Do I make every effort to establish and nurture an inclusive working environment?
- ◆ Do I make every effort to establish and maintain a safe working environment?
- ◆ Do I recognize all employees for their accomplishments?
- ◆ Am I respectful and considerate of all employees?

If you answered “yes” to all of the above questions, then you are well on your way to developing an effective relationship with all of your team members. If you answered “no” to a few, then you know where to focus your efforts.

former coworker friends. If you rely on them exclusively, you’ll need to break that habit and break it fast. Otherwise, you’ll be labeled as a supervisor who plays favorites, and they’ll be labeled “teacher’s pet” or worse.

One of the toughest challenges, particularly for new supervisors, is managing former peers — specifically, how to be their pal without making them your “go to” person for all things work related. Unfriending them on Facebook may make that a bit more dif-

ficult, but it’s not impossible. They’ll have to understand that before you were a supervisor, you could pick and choose friends among your coworkers, but now you have to treat everyone the same. That means not playing favorites. You can talk about it with them. They’ll be skeptical, however, until you prove your point, and you can only do that by your actions.

Beginning a New Relationship

As a coworker, your job was to produce, create, sell, deliver, and so on. As a supervisor, you’re there not only to get the product out the door or provide service to the customer but also to lead, teach, coach, motivate, evaluate, and discipline. You can succeed at each of those tasks only when you have demonstrated that you value each team member equally. You do that by treating every employee with the same respect, consideration, and fairness.

Tip

Be sure to honor your employer’s “neutral reference policy,” if applicable, by not making recommendations or posting positive or negative job-related feedback about current or former employees on the Internet.



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