

Speak with respect

What supervisors say, and how they say it, can affect employee productivity and company profitability.

by Ed and Todd Wandtke

■ In consulting assignments across the country, we have frequently encountered supervisors who are doing more to lose business and employees than to increase retention and morale.

In the following examples, you will read typical supervisor comments to employees. The first alternative weakens morale and lowers employee productivity. The second approach encourages employees.

Employee respect and response is directly influenced by the words that a supervisor uses. As you read the following typical situations, you may be surprised to recognize some of your own actions.

→ Giving instructions

Supervisors need to deal with employees who just don't seem to remember what to do—no matter how many training films they've viewed or how often they've heard directions.

● **Bad:** There is only one way to take the equipment off the truck. I've told you this time and time again.

Better: Let me show you the correct way to take the equipment off the truck to avoid hurting yourself or damaging the equipment.

Rationale: Correcting or changing employee behavior requires that you be positive, persistent, patient and practical. Avoid being vague or generally abstract. Harshness, embarrassment and ridicule do not motivate an individual.

● **Bad:** When are you going to learn how to use the weed wacker in the most efficient way?

Better: Fred, the best way to use the weed wacker is with a two-step motion. Here, let me show you.

Rationale: Degrading employees seldom brings out the best in performance. Taking the time to become personally involved with the employee's training lets him or her know that you care about his/her success.

→ Disciplinary problems

Delivering disciplinary action is hard for most supervisors.

● **Bad:** You have been late, one or two days a week, for the past three weeks. How are you going to solve this problem?

Better: Being late five times in the past three weeks has caused your crew to work overtime. You have left me no option but to write you up for being tardy. One more time and you will be given the day off with no pay.

Rationale: Learning when an employee is becoming such a problem that formal action is required takes time. Be consistent and establish standards for all supervisors in your company to use.

● **Bad:** Don't forget what we talked about yesterday. I'll be watching you.

A technique to help reduce the pressure on an individual who doesn't work well under pressure is to remove the pressure.

Better: Hi, Tom! Good to see you at work today!

Rationale: In this instance, greet the employee cheerfully, indicating how happy you are to see him or her at work. Keeping morale up after having to discipline an employee is difficult. How you handle the next day is crucial.

→ Performance reviews

An employee evaluation can be a dumping session, or it can be a building block for the employee. How you handle and encourage two-way communication can make a difference.

● **Bad:** Let's go over your evaluation. Here's how I rate you. Do you have any questions?

Better: (Handing the employee the written evaluation): As you can see, you haven't done well. Let me suggest some training. It's essential to the progress of the company, we all need it, and it looks good in your records. I would like to schedule you for the

Dale Carnegie sales course on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. It's a great program. How does that sound to you?

Rationale: Providing an employee a copy of your evaluation demonstrates that you care about his or her future with the company. It will also help identify areas where improvement is needed, without your involvement.

→ Absent-mindedness

Some employees have a problem remembering instructions. Writing them down often proves useless.

● **Bad:** (Looking at a five-inch stack of papers in the "in" basket): Helen, how long will it take to get the billing out today?

Better: Remember, Helen, you are to get the billings out each day as the jobs are completed. That's your main job. Let's go through your basket of papers after you complete the billing.

Rationale: Employees handle pressure and a long list of duties differently. Remove the pressure from an employee who doesn't work well under stress. Pace the work flow to an employee to provide them a level of encouragement and realization that they can achieve the desired results.

→ Company clowns

Here's a tip on how to keep good employees busy and avoid clowning-around time.

● **Bad:** Why are you just standing there? We have a lot of other tasks to perform on this property before we can go.

Better: Let's look at the schedule of what has to be done on this property. Then you'll know what to be working on next.

Rationale: Having job activities detailed on the work order will make it easier to assign the next task as work is completed. Keeping low priority assignments readily available for any employee to do will avoid having individuals standing around. Crews need to maintain involvement from everyone.

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