



Hello and welcome to another session of troubleshooting here in the Supervisors Circle!

Troubleshooting is an opportunity for folks like you and me to come together and talk through some of the really challenging parts of being a supervisor. And sometimes just the little challenging parts. It doesn't always have to be some huge, big problem. Sometimes the little problems can really add up.

Whether you consider your problem huge or small, whatever the case may be, you are always welcome to submit it here. You're always welcome to come on live and share your problem. You're always welcome to come and give your advice or listen to what other folks are talking about after every one of these. We also post the question in the Forum to encourage further discussion.

And my guess, my assumption, my I'm pretty sure I'm right but I shouldn't say a hundred percent definitively is that whatever problem gets brought up here, it's going to be relevant to lots of other people. Maybe not exactly every detail. But most of it is going to resonate with lots of people because we tend to encounter the same sorts of troubles as we are walking the supervisory path.

I do want to throw out there today. I'm battling this cold not even a cold. It's this persistent cough that will not go away. I had it for a few weeks. It finally went away and a couple months later, it came back. I'm fine. I feel fine. It's just this really I don't know a word I can say on tape to say cough that won't go away. So, if I get into a coughing fit, I'll have my water with me. I have my cough drops. If it gets bad enough, I'll edit it out but just a little of a bit of a disclaimer there that I might have to step away for just a moment for my cough. We'll see how it goes.

All right. So, let's take a look and- I'm telling you, she is like clockwork. The second I say let's begin, here she comes. So, Selena's here to join us as we read the trouble of the week.

*"I've been a supervisor for about a year now, and I think I'm finally getting it, but no one is letting me know one way or another. I ask my staff all the time if they have feedback for me and they always say no. I've asked my own supervisor for feedback, and they always say, 'you're doing great' and nothing else. What can I do to get more helpful feedback?"*

Case in point, this is one of those issues that I'm sure resonates with lots of you.

It's interesting to me because when a lot of people become supervisors for the first time, one of the things they're really conscious of and really cautious of is this fear of being a micromanager. I hear this all the time. *I don't want to micromanage my staff. I hate being micromanaged.*

It's a bit of an unfounded fear- not completely. Because it is in fact, the number two complaint that people have of their supervisors is that they micromanage too much.



But guess what the number one complaint that people have of their supervisors is?

The entire other end of that pendulum.

It's absentee leadership.

Many times, to overcorrect that fear of being a micromanager too many of us then go way to the other end of that extreme and we become negligent. We become neglectful. We become absentee managers.

Like many things in supervision the truth, the secret, the path lies somewhere in the middle. Of course, nobody wants to be a micromanager. No one wants to be supervised by a micromanager, but you should be equally perhaps maybe even a little bit more so concerned with being that absentee leader.

And finding the right balance which like most things will vary from staff to staff. But figuring out the right level of communication, the frequency, the type, the level of support that you're providing will be a little bit different to each of your staff.

Feedback when done correctly is one of the most helpful tools that we have for our own growth and as supervisors to support the growth of the people we're supervising.

Unfortunately, a lot of people don't have positive experiences with feedback both giving and receiving. People don't receive enough of it. Or they only are ever told the things they're doing wrong.

People who give it are often met with resistance and people being defensive, so they don't want to do it.

It's such a shame because it's necessary for us to grow.

All the self-reflection in the world can't help us see our blind spots. All the self-reflection in the world can't ever truly let us know what it's like to be supervised by us. We can only get that information from the people we're supervising.

Or on the flip side- we can't ever know what it's like to supervise us. We can only get that from the people who are supervising us. So, we have to implement a consistent flow of feedback into the work we're doing so we understand how we're doing as supervisors and then certainly to implement this feedback culture for our teams. So, they know how they're doing and that they can continue to grow.

Some things to consider with feedback generally and with this issue particularly is, what is the purpose of feedback?

Ultimately, when done correctly the purpose of feedback is to help people grow.

That's it.



There's a lot of things about working with other people that sometimes get on our nerves that sometimes aren't the way we would prefer it to be. But it doesn't necessarily have to do with their performance. It doesn't have to do with their growth.

Many times, we have our own preferences. And we use our preferences to tell other people about what we think they're doing wrong. That's the type of feedback people receive when there's so much that goes into work- our perspectives, our experiences, our skills, our goals- and too many supervisors just want the people they supervise to do things exactly the same way that they do them.

So, they get feedback that they're doing it wrong, when really, it's another way to do it. And it can be just as effective.

When you are in a position as you are as a supervisor to give feedback to other people, before doing so always ask yourself, is this intended to help this person grow?

Often, we associate feedback with something critical. I've been doing it myself just talking about the things people do wrong. But feedback necessarily includes praise.

That's part of what is letting people know what they're doing right to help them grow, to continue to do that thing.

When you are going to give someone feedback ask yourself, is this intended to help them grow? Or is it just some petty annoyance that I don't want them to do anymore or am I pushing my way on them unnecessarily because the way they're doing it is actually quite fine? Is this feedback intending to help them grow?

Which brings me to the second thing to consider.

What is your purpose in seeking feedback?

Is it to help you grow?

We all want to be praised. We all want to be valued for the work that we do. That's important. If you're not getting the recognition and appreciation that you need it's important that you let your supervisor know that.

And that should not be the only reason that you're seeking feedback.

Too many supervisors when they hire someone new that first day on orientation, one of the first things that comes out of their mouths is, 'I'm so open to feedback. I just want you to be honest with me. Anything you have to tell me; I want to hear it. I want to grow. I need your feedback to be better.'

And the first time the staff offers that feedback, and the boss gets really defensive, that is a sure sign to the staff, I should not be taking this boss up on their offer. It's not sincere. They don't really want to grow.



It's just something they feel like they have to say.

Don't be one of those bosses.

Let your staff know and be sincere that you want feedback from them in order to help them grow. And let them know from the jump that you're going to be giving them lots of feedback too to help them grow. To continue to frame it in the purpose for which it's intended to help people grow.

So, if you open that door, nope, when you open that door, be prepared to hear some things that you might not like. Or you might not have been expecting. How you react to that is going to set up the feedback culture on your team going forward.

The minute you get defensive, the minute you send that sign to your staff that despite what you said, you really don't want their honest opinion, they're going to stop giving it.

When you said that you keep asking your staff for feedback, and they don't give you any, it means the trust isn't there yet.

I believe you when you say that a year in, you're starting to get it, you're starting to feel more comfortable. That's great. Congratulations.

I promise you there are still a million things you're doing that your staff wishes you would do differently. It's true for all of us.

There's no way particularly after one year in that you are the ultimate perfect supervisor equally to every staff you supervise. It just doesn't work that way.

Think back to the supervisors, you loved the most throughout your years. Mine always comes to mind very easily.

Fabulous supervisor and not perfect.

There were things that even though they were fabulous I wish were a little bit different. The same is true for your staff.

If you're asking them for feedback, and they're never giving you any that's a sign not that you're doing it perfectly, but that they don't quite trust you yet.

And it might not have anything to do with you. It might be the baggage that they've had with feedback throughout their careers, that they've been burned before so to speak and they're not going to do that again.

The second piece of this is just using that word. It's so heavy. It has all this baggage and connotation to it. Generally, unfortunately negative.



So, if you say to your staff in this broad sweeping statement, do you have any feedback for me?

It's a loaded question.

No wonder they're saying no.

Instead, you need to ease them into the process. Let them know that you are open to it through not just your words, but through your actions and your response. We'll get to that a little bit later.

But if you are sincere and saying you want this feedback to help you grow, then you need to be open to hearing some things that might not feel great to hear but are then given to you as you requested for the purpose and helping you grow.

Think of your own experiences if your bosses throughout the years have asked you for feedback. Have you been comfortable giving your 100% honest opinion the stories and thoughts you share with your friends and family after a tough day?

In most cases the answer is no.

Even though organizational structures are flattening, even though some of the old ways of hierarchy on organizational charts are going away the truth of the matter is when you are someone's supervisor there is an inherent discrepancy in power.

It shouldn't be surprising that it's a vulnerable, uncomfortable place for staff to give their bosses, their supervisors, feedback.

I also teach ESL classes. I've been doing this for very long time. I hope to do it forever and ever as well. I do it part-time. I really, really enjoy it.

I teach all international students, and very recently I started teaching an English for professional leadership class. It was like all my worlds coming together.

We just very recently had a couple of classes on feedback, and we talked about culturally these are students who come from all over the world- East Asia, the Middle East, South America, West Africa, East Africa, all over the place and I've said, in your culture traditionally, is there an opportunity, is it culturally acceptable to say to a boss, 'Hey boss. Here's some feedback I have for you'?

Some said yes, but the vast majority said, 'no way, we would never do that.'

I told them, even here in the US where we have situations like this and you have people like me saying, of course everybody's equal and everyone's open to feedback no matter what position you are. We know that's not true. We know that we also have lots of bosses and supervisors who don't want to hear it from their staff. They don't think they should have to hear it from the staff because they're the boss. So certainly, it's in lots of





parts of our culture as well.

Something to keep in mind that in certain cultures inherently, it is not acceptable. It might not even be something they would think to say to a supervisor, to tell them how to do their job better. It's just so far outside of what they were raised to believe.

Your boss on the other side there could be lots of reasons depending on your boss. Often the reason bosses don't give feedback tends to fall into one of two reasons, sometimes both.

One is that they're really busy and they have a million things going on. And even though you're supposed to meet with them every other week, it constantly gets bumped from the calendar. And even though theoretically they would want to be dedicating more time to giving you that feedback for the nature of their busyness that it just doesn't become a priority. The other reason is often that they're afraid or uncomfortable that they've had their own bad experiences giving feedback to staff. They don't want to rock the boat.

People constantly say, I'm just not a confrontational person. It's just not an excuse. We talk about that a lot in other videos as well.

One- confrontation in the sense of addressing something, confronting something, a confrontation isn't always a fight though. We often conflate those two.

Confronting someone to talk about an issue that needs to be talked about- that is a necessary part of your role as a supervisor.

So, saying that you're just not a confrontational person doesn't cut it.

Plus giving feedback isn't about personality. It's a skill. It's a skill that you can learn so you can't just absolve yourself of the responsibility and say, 'well I'm just not built that way.' It doesn't work. A big part of your role as a supervisor is helping your team- your most important part really, and you can't do that without having these very important conversations with them.

Which is an important point.

The best feedback, the most effective feedback is conversational. For too many people, it's been, I'm the supervisor telling you what is right and what is wrong.

People don't respond to that.

People don't grow from that.

For feedback to be really effective you want to have conversations with your staff. Talk to them about their goals, what they're trying to do. What was their experience of what happened? What are some things they've tried that have worked and haven't worked. There's a lot of coaching skills that should be intertwined with your feedback.



It doesn't work, it doesn't help people grow to say, I'm your supervisor. I know best. I'm going to tell you what's right and wrong.

So, how do you get the feedback you're looking for? Let's divide this because you mentioned feedback from your staff as well as feedback from your supervisor, which tends to be two different situations.

As it pertains to your staff you need to tread lightly. You need to start small, and you need to. Make it easy for them. Just asking someone for feedback, it's so big. Where do I begin? And again, I advise you not even to use that word. But you can let your staff know why you're asking. You *should* let your staff know why you're asking. Remember always explaining why.

*It's important to me that I continue to grow as a supervisor and it's important to me that I continue to help you grow and I can't do that to the best of my ability without hearing from you how I can do it better.*

Keep coming back to that. Instead of asking, do you have any feedback from me? Start small and specific and give them a little notice in the beginning. It's hard for people to think on the spot. You're sitting in a one-on-one and all of a sudden, what feedback do you have for me?

Start small and say, hey staff, I'm really working on making our team meetings more valuable. I would really love for you during our next team meeting to really pay attention to moments that you feel are really valuable for the team and moments where you feel weren't the best use of our time. And next time when we have a one-on-one, I'm going to ask you for your thoughts on that.

(There goes cough one. Let's see if we can make that first and last.)

So you've been very specific, you've given them something to respond to, you've given them a heads up. So, it's much more comfortable to start that way. And you have to follow through. A lot of things get lost in the shuffle, but if you ask staff that and then the next time you have a one-on-one you completely forget to talk about it, you've wasted a really valuable opportunity.

So, the next time you meet for the one-on-one, so what did you observe? What did you think?

Your response to that is going to model for them how they too can respond to feedback. First and foremost, always expressing gratitude. Thank you for that. I really appreciate that.

Which doesn't mean you have to agree. And it doesn't mean your staff have to agree. Part of what supervisors label as defensive is simply a staff disagreeing with the feedback they're receiving. It's okay to disagree. It's healthy and important



to disagree and you can disagree too. Show staff how to do it in a way that you're still appreciative and that it opens a conversation.

Oh interesting, that's not how I experienced it. What made you say that? Or that's really I'm really curious about that and start to make it a conversation.

That's where the gold is.

Do that a couple of times. Then start to ease off a little bit and maybe then after a couple of weeks you do ask them something on the spot. And you make it a regular part of your one-on-ones of your team meetings where that feedback culture is just flowing in all directions.

The healthiest teams have feedback among each other also. In most cases, that doesn't come naturally. So that's another thing where you can scaffold and model for your team.

During team meetings if one staff proposes an idea, gives a presentation, or shares something you can ask other staff, what did you really like about that idea? What are some suggestions you have for them?

And really start to implement those types of conversations so that eventually you don't have to be the scaffold. You don't have to keep prepping everybody that you've shown over time that this is a team that can be trusted. This is a process that can be trusted and that its intention is good. Its intention is to improve performance, to help people reach their goals, to help them grow.

That's what people want.

In terms of your supervisor, you may want to try something similar. If your supervisor, if the reason they're not giving you their feedback is that they're busy and or that they're afraid of the feedback this might work and help.

Sitting down unprepared and asking them, what feedback do you have for me could also catch them off guard. So maybe like with your staff you prep them a little bit. Hey supervisor. I'm working on X. I would really love to get your thoughts on that. Can we check in next week next month about what you've been noticing about X?

In a perfect world, you shouldn't have to prepare people to give you feedback. Certainly not from your own supervisor. But we live in an imperfect world and often even though you're doing everything you should as a supervisor with your own staff, you don't always receive that same thing from your own supervisor, which is unfortunate.

You can begrudge it, or you can do something about it.

Now do your best to implement strategies to try and get what you need from your supervisor? You can't control it. So, if you've done everything you can you're still not getting the feedback you need from your supervisor.





That becomes another question. Are you okay with that? Are you okay continuing to work for someone's not going to give you the feedback you need? If not, there's some bigger questions to ask yourself.

But don't give up just yet- change is slow and sometimes people need that time to get used to new ways of doing things.

What other thoughts do folks have? What did I miss? What are some other things you can add to help get the feedback that you're looking for?

As supervisors you want to make sure that you're making feedback a really central part of your work to help and help your staff grow.

So, if you have your own issue that you'd like to share, please feel free to email us through the Supervisors Circle.

We can do an anonymously like we did it today. You can jump online and do it live. Anybody can also share their thoughts afterwards in the Forum.

So, I thank you for your time. I thank you for your continued dedication to becoming the best supervisor you can be. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and I look forward to seeing you next time!