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

We do these sessions for three main reasons. First and foremost, to let you know that you're not alone.

Supervising can feel really isolating and often where you're working, there might not be someone that you can talk to about what's going on.

In hard times it might feel like everyone else has it figured out and you're the only one who's struggling.

I'm here to say emphatically that is not true.

This is hard for all of us. It's really important to remind ourselves of that so that we don't get too far down on ourselves when our challenges pop up.

Because believe me they are going to pop up. It's a good reminder to say other people have experienced this, are experiencing it too, that this is a normal part of what is a very hard thing.

Which leads us to our second purpose and that is for community and connection.
It can really help to talk to other people when you have a problem.

It's not mere commiserating or venting. Although those can be very helpful as well. But a chance to support one another, encourage one another, to build relationships with other people who want to become a strong leader just like you.

Of course importantly is the third main reason which is to help you solve your problem. It is highly unlikely we'll be able to solve it here in the time we have together, but what we can do is offer some new insight, some things to think about, some resources, strategies, and tips to help you make the best decision for yourself in true coaching fashion.

We do these live, we put up the recording, and then we put the question in the form as well. There are lots of opportunities to engage. You can engage live or after the fact as someone offering that support, as someone offering strategies and tips, or as the person who is submitting the trouble.

With all that said let's take a look at today's trouble.

"I inherited my team and have been their manager for about six months so far so good, but there's always a butt right lately. Something has come up. Our highest performer is also the most difficult. I've heard staff complain about her and to be honest. She has started to rub me the wrong way, too. Can I fire someone just because no one likes working with them?"

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Who has not experienced a moment where you said, Can I just get this person off my team particularly in this case where you inherit the team? You didn't have any say on who was on there and who you were hiring.

We had a similar trouble a couple weeks back that was more specific to the manager. The manager had written in and saying I just don't like this employee. So it sounds like they don't like this employee either but it's more than just the supervisor and staff. It's something that has really made its way around the team.

What do you think? Can you just can you fire someone because nobody likes working with them?

Let's look at some questions to consider.

First and foremost. What are the reasons for the complaints? What are the complaints from staff and ultimately from you?

Are you being swayed by staff? Did you have complaints in the beginning or because staff has had these complaints has that then planted a similar complaint in your head.

Is it one staff who's really leading the charge or leading the complaining?

Is it across the board? So what what's being said who's saying it in in what circles is it being said those Dynamics are important to understand. Unfortunately sometimes on teams there's somebody who just likes to stir that pot, right?

It's important to get an understanding difficult this word difficult.

We've talked many times about loaded words difficult is a loaded word. What does it mean difficult to you might be a walk in the park to me difficult is often coded language to use with certain groups of people.

We don't have context here as to what makes this employee difficult or I should say perceived to be difficult.

What is difficult? What is this employee doing that people are complaining about? Many times people complain when things are different.

It's very easy for all of us to think that the way we do things, the way we communicate, the way we connect with other people is the right way. We've chosen this way because it's right to us and that's why we do it.

When someone comes along who does it differently, communicates differently, works differently, builds connection differently, it's very easy to resist that and certainly to judge it that my way is the right way. So the way that they communicate is difficult. The way that they build relationships is off-putting or any sort of negative adjective we'd put there.

Is this a case where it's someone who is and does things differently than the team is used to?

While that can be incredibly challenging in many cases, it can be incredibly valuable because it's a way to- this is hard anytime I come to one of those balancing points. I want to just dig into it because they're all so delicate and complex in their own right and here's another one.

We talk a lot about that fit, the cultural fit, which is another loaded word. What does it mean to have a cultural fit?

Ultimately, we do want people who are on the same page in terms of vision and mission and values. That's what we need to make teams work.

But the delicate balancing act is that we don't want to cross that line into a space of groupthink meaning that we're only getting one perspective. We're only getting one small piece of that pie of being able to see the issue or work through some of the challenges from one lens because everybody is on the same page.

So it's sounding a little contradictory what I'm saying. That's not what I'm trying to articulate. I'm fumbling through it a little bit because it is hard to distinguish. You want people to be of the same mind in terms of what are we doing, why are we doing it, what is important about this work, what's the vision... We certainly want to be on the same page about that.

Where we want to be cautious of that group think is are we intentionally closing off important alternative points of view, perspectives, things that could make our work stronger because we dismiss it as not part of a cultural fit. They just don't fit in here.

Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe not. Maybe, you know again, we just have this word difficult to work with but it's not an uncommon word that we use when it comes to colleagues, bosses, people we supervise, anyone in our lives, really.

Take some time to think about what you're meaning when you use that word difficult.

Another time that word challenges us is when people challenge us.

Staff who want to know why staff, who push back a little bit. Staff who stick up for what they believe in or ask us to do something differently.

As much as we say we're open, as much as we say we want to hear from everyone, that can be difficult to hear these kinds of things.

So when someone reminds us that we're a little less than perfect, that we have our own shortcomings, that can make us react in a way that says they're just being difficult.

They just won't do what I ask them to do- how difficult.

Well again, it may be true. They may be difficult in a way that is not helpful, but their difficultness. Difficulty? Difficult? I don't know. They're being difficult could be a benefit even if it feels difficult and hard in the moment.

Another time people use this word and push back is when someone outshines a little bit. Our egos are everywhere- mine certainly and yours, too.

You have written in that this is your best staff. This is your highest performing employee. Sometimes just that alone causes other people to feel some kind of way, jealous, insecure. And instead of examining those feelings, addressing what's going on for them, it's a lot easier to point fingers and say that other person is the problem.

Anytime you find yourself having issues with other folks and this is part of life, right? We don't equally get along as easily with every person in our lives.

What's the source of that difficulty?

In this case, we're not sure. And again, we make no promises to fix everything. But hopefully that will help you as you're thinking about what to do going forward the ultimate question. You're asking. Can you fire someone because you don't like them?

What is going on with your assessment of this person? And what's going on with your team's assessment? We want most everything to come back come back down to performance.

That's our focus.

Many times our coworkers, colleagues, people we supervise do things we just don't like. They're kind of annoying, particularly if you're working in a place where you're still physically working side by side with folks 8 or more hours a day. There's human behaviors that gate on us, right and sometimes that really hits our last nerve or it starts to escalate into other things.

We try to not spend so much energy on those but really think about how is this impacting performance? Does it impact performance and if it doesn't then does it really need to be addressed? In many cases that will answer your question.

But not always.

Sometimes somebody is difficult in a way that is taking away from the work indirectly.

They may be really harming the morale of other people and we know how that can trickle down into lots of other negative consequences, like staff retention, like their ability to stay focused and present.

It may or may not ultimately impact somebody's performance. Like they're still getting their reports and they're still doing what's asked of them. But do they suddenly have one foot out the door or they leave all together?

Is it harming what could be better because the relationships aren't as strong and it's impacting the way that people collaborate or stop collaborating for that matter?

In most cases, we want to be really clear about focusing on the impact on performance. Sometimes it's tricky to say because of this action, here's the direct consequence. Those conversations to me anyway are a lot easier. You didn't turn your report in on time and we didn't get the grant which means we can't run the program. Those are pretty clear objective consequences when performance isn't being met.

But something like causing some disruption impacting how people feel. There are consequences to that but it's really hard if not impossible to say because of your difficult personality or behavior these things are happening that are impacting performance. So they're harder conversations to have in relation to performance.

Where I find some of this really gray area to be beneficial to confront is in supporting that person in their own growth.

I have someone who comes to mind. I invite you to think of someone who might come to mine for you. I wouldn't describe mine exactly in the same way this person did but but same ballpark-really high performer, really rubbed a lot of people the wrong way.

They weren't unaware of that and it didn't seem to matter to them very much if other people liked them or not. They I think we were probably not the only place where they had experienced what was going on or heard some of the same comments.

What I knew about this person and is generally the case with high performers is their performance matters and they have goals that they're trying to reach.

So when I would have conversations with them it really focused on that part of it in what their goals were and how they show up. how they connect with other people, how they communicate might get into in the way of those goals or not. I can't say for sure.

It's a balance of saying, this might be the consequence of showing up as you are.

And it's an unfair consequence.

We do this all the time where we should be able to for example give open and honest feedback to our own supervisors.

In a perfect world, that should happen. In reality, there's a lot of supervisors out there- none of you, I'm quite sure- that will react very negatively to receiving feedback from someone they supervise. Who may hold it against you, who may fire you because of

it.

So these conversations are both saying you have every right to be exactly who you are.

And here's what some of the consequences might be in a realistic imperfect world.

Ultimately then you make your own decisions. If people perceive me a certain way, that's their problem. I'm not changing a thing about me.

That's one way to go about it. And some would argue that's a really authentic way to go about it. Other people will say well it's getting in the way of what I'm trying to accomplish. Maybe I have to pay attention to some of this feedback I'm receiving. Another really difficult line.

Are people having those feelings and reactions because of their own stuff?

Because of their own insecurities, because of their own egos because of their own biases?

It's really complicated.

In the case of this person you mentioned, are they open to these kinds of conversations? Have you tried to have these conversations with them?

Not so much in the sense of here's what everyone thinks you're doing wrong but how how does showing up in this way benefit where you're trying to go?

They might challenge you on that. My guess is they likely will But could It ultimately benefit them. That's what our role is- to help our staff grow including the ones who are difficult, including the ones who challenge us, including the ones who might not appreciate sometimes the ways in which we help them grow.

This ties in very closely to the previous two. But what's the validity of the complaints?

Is the person, this quote unquote difficult person, doing things that are really unacceptable, that are really taking away from the work?

Or is it some of that other stuff, some of our own egos and insecurities and biases that are getting in the way?

For you too. You admitted this person's rubbing you the wrong way. Is it just because they have a personality you're not so drawn to?

Is it because they're doing something that they shouldn't be doing because it's getting in the way of the work in a way that they are responsible for? Again, see how tricky it is because how they're showing up might be getting in the way of the work, but that's because of the way people are responding to it or it's because of the way people are interpreting it or reacting to it.

So it's really hard to know for sure. But my guess is even if we had all the details, even if we knew exactly what the situation was, these can still be really tricky things. Where's the line between- we're not on the same page, it's getting in the way of the work and our own group think, our own resistance to difference, our own unwillingness to work through some of the bumpiness of working with people who challenge us or or we just don't like or operate very differently.

But if we can make that work ultimately, it increases impact and makes our final result better.

It's really hard to distinguish that. Because also it's not just a decision chart-do they do this? If yes do this, if no do this, right? All of a sudden you get to the bottom and it tells you exactly what to do.

It's hard to know. It's hard to distinguish when we are resisting something different because it's different or we are legitimately trying to address something that's impacting the work.

It's not because of the way that we are contributing to that work being impacted...

My head is swimming a little bit.

Biases are here, there, and everywhere just like Roy Kent, Here, there, and everywhere.

I won't even say are there biases coming up? I will say what biases are coming up for you because they're there- everywhere.

So with this particular person, is there a certain bias or multiple biases that are impacting your perception of them being difficult?

How do you know?

We talk a lot about unconscious bias. And one of the things that frequently comes up with unconscious bias is trying to confront it and I always think well if it's unconscious then how do you even know, right?

But look for patterns. Are there other people throughout your career who you have similarly had a hard time with or similarly labeled as difficult? Are there some patterns or connections there and what might that be exposing to you about what some of your biases may be?

Ultimately, your question was can we can I fire someone just because I don't like them. Another tricky question and answer. Something seems so clear and obvious on the surface, but once you start to dig in it gets so complicated.

In many workplaces and many states employees are considered at will which means you can fire them for any reason including you just don't like them.

But - I told you there's always a butt.

There are reasons that you can't fire people. Having said it's an out at will state you can fire people for whatever reason but you can't fire people for certain reasons. There are protected classes, which means you can't fire someone for example, just because they're a woman. You can't fire someone just because they have a disability.

So no, you can't fire someone for any reason. But if you decide that they're just not a fit, can you fire them for that?

It depends is a constant answer. Assuming this is an at will position in an at-will state, can you fire them because you don't like them?

Maybe.

Can you tie it back to a protected class? That's where you start to get into a little bit of trouble. So in your mind, you might say and you might authentically believe this person happens to be a woman. This person happens to have a disability. This person happens to be part of this protected class, but that's not the reason I fired them.

People won't just take your word for that. So you do have to be careful about what the perception is, what the potential legal ramifications can be and is it really true for you? Even though in your mind you might say it has nothing to do with the fact that they're part of this protected class.

Is that a hundred percent true? Is there something that might be bubbling under the surface that may be part of that is a little at least a little bit true.

Even in at-will states. If you have an HR department, they're going to tell you document, document, document that you want to have everything documented so that you don't then get sued for wrongful termination, hostile work environment, lots of these other things.

That you're able to show even though you don't have to show because it's an at-will state. You see how that that nothing's as simple as we make it out to be right? That every HR professional in the world will tell you document, document, document.

And in situations like this where it might not be something objective and egregious. It's one thing to say they cussed someone out in the middle of the meeting. Okay, that's a clear thing you can document.

But if they just seem a little bit aggressive or unpleasant. How are you even documenting that right? It gets really and sometimes trying to put into words and reading it and it can sound ridiculous. Sometimes like they were kind of mean so we

don't want them on our team.

But I get what you're saying as I'm laughing about it, too. Every person that joins your team and every person that leaves your team naturally shifts the dynamics because now you have a different iteration of people.

One of my jobs I referenced a lot. We were staff of 10. And unfortunately, we had a lot of turnover. We eventually got it under control for the most part but we had a lot of part-time folks which is just naturally a very high turnover situation when you're working with part-time folks. And would get comfortable with one another and go through all the team building and getting to know each other and working through issues and then someone would leave. So that shifts the dynamic and when there was a gap in employment, then they get used to that and then someone new comes on. So then it's getting used to that over and over and over again.

Can you fire this person probably?

Based on what you've told us probably.

Should you fire this person? I don't know. I don't know not without first examining some of these things to consider and then some told you we weren't going to fix it. I wish we could I wish these problems and troubles that come before us. It's like fix your problem in 30 minutes or less. We got you.

Just doesn't work that way.

But we're happy to keep talking about it. We're happy to keep supporting and encouraging and sharing.

This is what helps us make these tough decisions. And you know what? Some decisions that you make in hindsight are going to have been the wrong decision.

It's hard to accept that. I know you're here because you want to do the best that you can. I know that you're here because you want to do this job. Well, you want to Be an Effective supervisor. And it can feel really demoralizing. To know that you're trying you're absolute best you're doing everything you can and sometimes you're still going to get it wrong.

Sometimes you'll look back and say oh I should have. The best we can do is make the best decision we can in the moment.

We never have the benefit of hindsight in the moment. I don't know what you should do with this employee. I encourage you to continue working with this question and this issue with empathy, with talking with them, with understanding what your own feelings are that are coming up and talking through it with the team. These are hard conversations.

Sometimes they end up with the result you're really hoping for.

Sometimes they make things worse. Sometimes they don't change anything.

I don't want to leave it on a disheartening discouraging note. I always want to be honest and realistic and reassuring.

Which is you're reaching out because you're thoughtful about this because you understand. Well, this is difficult. It's also important and you want to make the best decision you can for this person for your team and for yourself.

You're entering this issue this problem and this problem solving process from a great place. That you want to make the best decision for everyone.

I hope this helped.

I hope you have a lot more responses from other people here in the Supervisors Circle who can share their thoughts, their insight, resources, tips strategies experiences to help you make a decision that is best for you for the staff for your team.

And to know that the reassured that you're doing this with the best intentions.

And the hope is to make that best decision and sometimes you will and sometimes you won't. And even though that's hard to accept that's the absolute best any of us can do.

I hope this was valuable.

If you or anyone else wants to submit your own challenge or issue you are always invited to do so you can send an email through the platform and we will schedule with you if you'd like to come on live or let you know when we'll be talking about it to work through the next issue.

Thanks so much for being here. Continue to show up as your best self, continue asking yourself the hard questions. This is what makes supervisors great.

And I know you want to be great and I know by being here and asking these questions you will be.

See you next time!