



Hello and welcome to our troubleshooting series.

This is a series where you are able to share some of the challenges issues problems that you're having and we as a community will do our absolute best to help you and always, always support you.

You can be a part of this and lots of different ways.

You can come on here live and share your problem. That way you can submit it with your name or anonymously and we'll discuss it on your behalf.

You can come as someone to give support or advice to others here live. Or if you're watching this as it's recorded, then you can post follow up in our forum where we'll always post the troubleshooting question there as well.

So, lots of opportunities to participate because look don't we know all of us run up against more than our own share of troubles in this work that we love but that is really, really challenging?!

The topics can be absolutely anything related to supervisory life. Now, let's see what today's topic is.

Today's issue:

*The holiday season is here and it's my first one at my new job as a manager. I have 16 people on my team. Am I supposed to buy something for everyone?*

This hits home in so many different ways and so many different iterations.

Let me start by saying this. We are recording this on December 1st. And here in the United States we are right in the midst of our holiday season that we tend to say starts around Thanksgiving and goes all the way into the new year.

Based on what you celebrate, your backgrounds, traditions- there are lots of holidays in there and it's a time when personally and often professionally there are a lot of celebrations and parties which often include gift giving.

If you are watching this when it's not holiday season don't turn us off because we know that gifts in the workplace is something that pops up all year round whether it's somebody's leaving or somebody's coming. It's someone's birthday. They bought a house. They're having a baby. They're retiring. They got promoted and on and on and on.

I'm part of a lot of online groups that involve a lot of supervisors and these questions come up constantly. 'I just got a new staff. What should I buy for them? I just had a new board member; our volunteer has been here 20 years...'



Certainly, during the holiday season these questions come up all the time and I get it. It's really hard to buy gifts for other people. We'll get to the cost in a minute, so let's not go there right away but certainly even in our personal lives, it can be challenging to know what to buy for people and it's so challenging demonstrated by the fact that we're reaching out to strangers on the internet to say, 'what should I buy for my boss?' when they have no idea who you are and they have no idea who your boss is.

Make it make sense!

You know your boss better than they do. If you can't figure out what kind of gift to give them, how can they?

It's interesting, but it's very common and it comes up year after year, holiday after holiday, incident after incident.

So, let's talk about this.

What do we do about gift giving in the workplace?

Whatever it is that you do, I encourage you to decide ahead of time and to do your absolute best to be consistent.

A big reason this happens is that these things pop up and we haven't thought about them ahead of time or we have no precedent, or everybody sort of does it their own way and we don't know how to proceed.

Because there's so many- I knew she was going to come. I promise you she ignores me all day long and the second she knows I'm talking to someone on camera, that's her cue. So, Selena says hello. She's my own special gift- most of the time.

So, every time something pops up., I'll see other people posting or people will ask me about it or it just comes up in conversation. 'Oh, my new staff is having a baby. Should we throw them a shower? What do we do? What's the protocol? Who pays for it? Who chips in?' And then someone buys a house and then someone's kid graduates from college and it's just on and on and on.

So, what I want to start with- we will get to things to consider in a minute- but before we even get there, however you decide, because like most things we talk about there are lots of ways you can go about it. You know, you're not going to walk away from today with a yes or no answer. Yes, get gifts or no don't get gifts. That's not how it works here because that's not how it works in the real world. There are too many nuances. There are too many specifics to everybody's situation and in this case, there are lots of arguments to be made to get everybody a gift. You could also make strong arguments to say no you shouldn't or don't have to get everyone a gift. You're not going to walk away with the answer for your particular situation. But what you will walk away with is some things to think about in order to come up with the answer that best serves you, your team, and your organization.



Whatever it is that you decide I encourage you to come up with some type of plan. It may sound silly like, 'do we really need a policy on gift giving?' My answer is yes, because otherwise especially in this case if you have a team of 16- my goodness! -

Something's always going to be going on with a group of 16 people. Even if you just supervise one person. Something's always going to be going on where you keep asking, 'Do I get a gift? What kind of gift? How much should I spend?' So, I encourage you if you have the power, ability to make that decision on your own- you might have to involve other folks at your organization. You might decide to involve your team in that conversation and see what they think and how they want to proceed.

We're going to focus most specifically on gifts, but we will weave in some discussion around celebrations as well. It's hard to talk about one without the other because same thing with celebrations, 'is a gift enough? Should we also have food do we have a lunch? Who do we invite?' These are things that well, they're not necessarily related to our work per se, but they're certainly related to our work and to our relationships and how our staff feel appreciated and recognized or not.

Step one- before we even get to Step One come up with this strategy or a plan so that when these things roll around- we can never plan for everything but we know the holidays are coming every year, we know when we hire people we know when they leave, we know that birthdays come up. So come up with some sort of plan so it's not such a moment of stress for you. Every time it comes where you can be more prepared.

So, let's start there and now let's see some things to think about

The first one is what do people really want?

Of course, we can't ever talk about people because every person who makes up that people is their own person. Of course, there are individual preference here.

We know that.

So, what we can do, you know your individual people best and having those conversations is really important. Also understanding what lots of people have found in research- people do this work for us. We don't have to just guess all the time. We have research and we have the folks who know best right in front of us.

What the research tells us goes against this constant question of what do I buy for...? What kind of gift do I get for...?

Because what people are telling us is the number one thing they want from you as a supervisor- so this isn't true if it's a colleague or this won't be true across all relationships- but let's start where our focus is here in The Supervisors Circle as a supervisor- what they want from you is your recognition, your praise, your sincere attempts to show them how much you appreciate them and how much you value them.



That can be as simple as a conversation, an email, a nice handwritten note.

It might seem like you're being cheap, or you might think that it will be perceived that way but again, you have the ability to set up the culture that you want on your team that will serve your team best. What research tells us time and time again is that the simple act of recognition is what matters.

Really sincere praise and gratitude from you is the number one thing people want.

Now if you feel so compelled to give people a gift even though that is a gift to praise them and show gratitude, it should come as no surprise to you that the two things people say they want that have a financial value- it's not coffee mugs. It's not company swag. It's not another tchotchke.

It's money.

And it's time off.

That's what people really want.

I know there is this compulsion to like wrap something and put a big bow on it. Perhaps it's the optics or perhaps it feels strange to you to give someone money or you think that time off isn't really a gift.

But we need to listen to our staff always and again, this won't be true for everyone. But when we look at the research, and we ask people what kind of gift they would want from their organization, those are the two that come up time and time again, so honor that.

Some other things to consider is, what's realistic?

Depending on your budget, depending on how your organization works you might have lots and lots of money for things like gifts and celebrations. You might have no money at all. It might depend on the season. So, you want to be realistic both in terms of costs, but also in terms of time. If we take this specific example of 16 staff, right that might sound like a lot to you, it might sound like a little to you depending on how many people you supervise.

The most I ever supervised was 10 and that felt like a lot to me.

Let me tell you because people had births, deaths, weddings, babies, and promotions and all those things. We've already talked about what are we going to do with that? So, for 16 people are we going to buy a gift for every birthday? Every time they join the organization? Every time they leave? Every time they get promoted? Every time it's their anniversary?

I mean, you'll have bagels in the break room every day, right? And maybe that's how you want to do it.



But you need to be realistic in terms of money, but certainly in terms of time. Does it just become like whose birthday is at this time, didn't we just do this yesterday right? Depending on the size of your company and lots of other things in there, but really think about what's realistic and what's meaningful to people too.

We are focusing on staff for sure. But we need to- we don't need to- we have the opportunity to expand this conversation a little bit because in addition to supervising staff which is the issue, we're focusing on today since that's what was given to us. But we can also start to think about what about gifts for bosses and board members and volunteers and colleagues like it's this never-ending cycle.

Really being thoughtful about how you want to approach this in the workplace. And being really conscious. Well, I think we're getting to that in another slide. If not, I'll come back to it.

Then what accomplishes the purpose?

I think a lot of times and I have to admit I probably fall into this category that depending on what your gift giving and receiving culture is in your family and your culture, it might feel weird to give someone money. It might not feel normal to you to give someone money. I grew up in a family culture where we did gifts. We wrap them and there was a way to wrap them and that was how we did gifts. We didn't give each other money. But a lot of people give money, and a lot of people appreciate receiving money. Some people might find it odd that they're receiving money. There's just a lot that comes with how we process money and anything really in this world.

So ultimately what is the purpose of giving these gifts?

A lot of times when it comes to gift giving specifically it feels like an obligation. Even though the focus should be on the receiver, it works much better if you as the giver receive that joy too. You are giving the gift because you are recognizing and it's not about you necessarily. But you also want it to be an experience that benefits the person you're giving the gift to and enhances the relationship, and you feel good about honoring them, right?

How do you accomplish the purpose?

The first thing to ask is, what's the purpose?

When you ask someone 'okay, it's Boss's Day. It's Secretary's Day. It's Teachers Day. It's this day. What do I buy? What do I give?' Before you jump there, ask yourself, what's the purpose? Why do you want to give this person a gift?

Is it because you feel like you have to? That's not necessarily a bad reason. There are lots of things we should do and maybe do take some time and money but are important so I'm not saying just because it might feel like an obligation means you shouldn't do it.



But if the purpose which I imagine it to be is to celebrate this person, is to thank this person, is to recognize this person then is the gift you're giving accomplishing that purpose?

Is the fact just the sheer fact that you're buying them anything at all, does that satisfy it or not?

One of my favorite blog posts came from one of my least favorite moments in in my working life where I used to work at this office, and it was small.

I am from Boston which obligates me to be a Dunkin Drinker (Dunkin Donuts when I grew up) and I get it. Lots of people hate on Dunkin coffee. That's fine by me.

So, every morning I'd come in with my Dunkin cup and everyone would be sitting around drinking their Starbucks and they would say something snide.

Every single morning.

That first holiday season when I worked there, it had been almost a year. The boss was giving out some cards for the holidays and to say thank you and inside were these gift cards to Starbucks.

Now I don't want to sound ungrateful.

I guess I do sound a little ungrateful because she didn't have to get me anything at all. But a part of me thought, you don't have to get me anything at all. I don't drink this and not only do I not drink this, I don't expect you to know everything about me but it's like the thing we talk about every single day.

It just was a moment of like, oh, you don't know me at all or you're not like individualizing this at all.

If you're thinking, stop whining and you're being ungrateful, I get it. I completely understand that point of view.

My point is if you're trying to show this person you care about them, you appreciate them and you get them something that they don't like. Yes, sometimes it's the gesture but sometimes it's not. Sometimes you really need to show your staff you know who they are and not just lumping them in with everybody else.

So, this week we do have a couple extra things to consider because this is a hot topic for me. I think it's a hot topic this time of year. But also, it's just something that can be very joyful, but can be very burdensome and very stressful.

Some additional things to consider with these celebrations and with these gifts you may decide you never do gifts at all. Again. There are lots of ways to go about this that can



serve the purpose of still making sure your staff feel honored and recognized.

But when it comes to these celebrations you need to be really conscious of what you're asking of your staff.

Different people attribute different meaning to their work. Some people make their work life very social, and they love to get to know their co-workers and they love to go out after work and they meet each other on weekends and they friend each other on social media. Some people that's the role of work for them or it's a role of work for them in their lives.

For lots of other people, they don't want anything to do with that. Their job is their job. They will do what is asked of them. They make their professional relationships, but they don't feel comfortable. They don't want to; they don't need to cross that line into any sort of social stuff. They're just like, 'let me do my job. I don't want to do this party. I don't want to have the celebration. I don't want to do karaoke night' particularly if it's out of office time.

What happens with out of office time is sometimes supervisors try to make it mandatory even though it's not office time. So don't do that. I said I'm going to tell you there's a lot of ways you have flexibility. Not on this. Don't do that. There should not be flexibility on that.

If you do have things outside of office time, which I think you really need to think about because there's a lot that can happen there that you probably don't want to have happen. What happens inadvertently sometimes is maybe you decide, 'okay. I'm not going to make it mandatory. People can come if they want.'

But what's the result of that?

Some people will come all the time. Some people will never come. And consciously maybe subconsciously you start to view the folks who don't come as maybe they don't care. Maybe they're not as invested. But even aside from that you just naturally get to know the folks who come better because you're spending more time with them. So that can then negatively impact the folks who aren't coming for whatever reason.

They might be busy. They might have people they're taking care of. They might have another job, or they just might not want to go. The reason doesn't matter. It's out of office time.

So, think about what those implications might be if you're having these things outside of office time, whether they're mandatory, which they should not be or whether they're voluntary.

And certainly, who are you asking to pay for what? This is a bigger conversation we'll have multiple times because it also comes up a lot. The money stuff in offices. There's this funny- however, you feel about Family Guy- there's this funny scene in Family Guy



when he's at the office and he's trying to get to the bathroom. He really, really has to go to the bathroom and then every ask that people have in the office, they intercept him as he's on the way to the bathroom. They're saying like, 'will you buy Girl Scout cookies from my kid? I'm doing a marathon. Will you sponsor me? So and so is retiring can you chip in five dollars?' And it's just like this litany of people asking him to contribute money. Get ahead of that.

There's a lot of discomfort. There's a lot of inequity that's involved in any sort of thing related to money, but these can create really awkward situations in the workplace. So when it comes to gifts, who are you asking to contribute to what? Do you have a culture where every time it's a birthday, every time it's a lunch, every time it's a whatever, everyone chips in? Do you do a white elephant toward the holidays where people buy a small gift, and they exchange gifts?

But what are you asking staff to spend their pocket money on?

If you ever have to do it and I'm not thinking of an instance where you would really have to do it, my personal opinion here. You are absolutely welcome to disagree. My personal opinion is really people shouldn't be paying anything out of their pockets for anything work related. You might have an argument otherwise. I'm open to hearing it.

And certainly, when it comes to dynamics. This other place I worked, we had sort of shout outs when things happened- people graduating, going back to school, babies, marriage, buying a new house, all that.

At one point the boss had a new baby, which was great. We've had other staff who had babies, too.

They sent an email to the organization and said, 'if you want to chip in for a gift, here's how you do it.'

I felt some kind of way about that because first of all, people are going to know if you chip in or not. And what are they going to think about me if I do or if I don't? And second of all, we've had all these other celebrations where nobody's being asked to chip in for colleagues or other folks and all of a sudden, we're being asked to pay out of pocket for someone who makes way more money than us?!

Be really conscious of out-of-pocket money and especially when those different tiers or levels on the org chart are concerned. That can get really, really sticky and it can really alienate your staff as well.

Also, when it comes to the holidays certainly we understand some people celebrate, some people don't. There are lots of different holidays during this six / seven-week time.

As an organization here in the United States- a lot of organizations have defaulted to this this term of holidays. 'It's a holiday party. It's an end of the year party.' But in terms of this time of year and certainly throughout the year what matters to people-



people have different celebrations culturally individually through the entire year.

Again, having these conversations in a meaningful way, so you set yourself up where it accomplishes the mission. You're not trying to alienate people. You're not trying to play favorites. You're not trying to be ethnocentric. So certain things get celebrated from dominant cultures, but other things don't, so my personal opinion which sometimes I share with you and sometimes I don't is we just need to scale back the gifts.

It's too much to keep track of with even your best intentions. Somebody's going to get left out of the equation for some big event that happened to them. How many times can you sneakily pass around an office card and ask people to sign it? It just becomes such its own thing.

It's unnecessary. It's unnecessary to reach the purpose again. What's the purpose- to make your staff feel appreciated, right?

So fall back on that research that says words of praise.

And if you want to involve money, money and time off- those are the two big things. Of course have these conversations with your staff individually and collectively to learn specifically what makes them feel appreciated and recognized.

So, what do you think?

Do you agree?

Do you think I'm way off the mark?

Did I leave something out?

Feel free to share your thoughts in all the many ways. You can share them here in the chat. You can come off mic. You can follow up in the forum and share your thoughts there. We really want to hear from lots of different voices because we are different. Because the staff we supervisor are different and because they're rarely is just one answer. It can be really helpful to hear different people's perspectives.

So if you ever have an issue, a trouble, problem and you want your own troubleshooter, you can email us here at The Supervisors Circle at [info@supervisorscircle.com](mailto:info@supervisorscircle.com).

Let us know if you want to come on the camera and talk it through. We also have group coaching sessions where you can get coached through your issues. So that's always an option. If you want to submit like our person did today anonymously and simply have us discuss the issue, we're really happy to do that, too.

So thanks for being here. I hope that this was helpful. I hope it gave you some good things to think about. If you're watching this during the holiday season or during a holiday season or a personal accomplishment for you.



I celebrate you. Celebration is so important and I hope you do feel appreciated, valued, and celebrated where you are. I hope you make an consistent effort to appreciate and celebrate the staff that you supervise and remember regardless of whether or not who you work with makes you feel valued, you are always valuable and we want to make sure our staff feel the same way.

I promise you it doesn't involve a gift.

But if you really, really are committed to doing gifts make sure you're doing so in an intentional way.

All right.