



Hello and welcome to another installation of the Supervisor's Circle troubleshooting. I'm so grateful for you to be with us today, whether you're joining us live or you're watching the recorded version.

This space is so important for supervisors at the very beginning of their career, in the middle of their career, toward the end of their career- at any point.

What we learn in videos and classes and courses and even degrees is really helpful to get us started in becoming effective supervisors and leaders.

But along the way we inevitably encounter situations where we take all that learning and it just does not work for some reason, many times for lots and lots of reasons.

One of the most important things that supervisors need is space and time and opportunity for both self-reflection and also to connect with other people to talk through some of those many issues. Those people can be peers. They can be your own supervisor, coaches, mentors.

Any and all of the above.

But we cannot do it alone, which is the heart and soul of the Supervisors Circle. Working through these situations with other people is really vital to our success as supervisors.

So, thanks for being here. Let's go ahead and dive in.

This week's issue was submitted to us, and as most of them are it was done so anonymously. That is perfectly fine and understandable.

*"I have a new staff person who is picking up the new job quickly and is doing it well. But her attitude has been really negative and almost aggressive. She's very disrespectful and is always questioning why something needs to be done and then done in that particular way. She pushes back on everything and it is exhausting. I would never speak to my supervisors the way she speaks to me. But what can I say? 'You have a bad attitude?' What can I do?"*

Whoo, there's a lot in here.

And I imagine if you've been supervising for any length of time something in here is ringing true for you, too.

And even if you haven't become a supervisor yet the people in your life professional or otherwise, I'm guessing at least parts of this sound very familiar.

We meet lots of people in our lifetime and chances are there are going to be some people who just rub us the wrong way.

Let's take a look at what is submitted to us when it's done. So in this way, we only have



the information in front of us, so we'll try not to make too many assumptions. And at the same time we'll play around with some of those assumptions in support of what we're trying to do which is to help this particular person through the issue. But of course helping others too and part of that process is for you to weigh in either here or we post everything in the Forum as well to continue the discussion, so lots of opportunities to be a part of this.

Let's go ahead into some of the things to consider.

The first is how are you defining disrespectful?

This is not a rhetorical question. And in fact, it's really quite an important one. Because there are these words we use a lot in our role and here comes Selena. She's like four to five minutes in on the dot. She senses something's being recorded and here she comes so Selena says hello.

There are a lot of words we use in a way that we understand what we mean when we say them.

Disrespectful is one of those words. We have our own understanding, our own threshold, definition, experience of what it means to be disrespectful.

Some other words that fit into this category or under this umbrella are words like professional or unprofessional.

Insubordinate.

We also use words where we have our own particular idea of where the line is.

That line between being confident and arrogant, between taking risks and being negligent, the line between taking initiative and being a steamroller. Or being bossy.

I am not saying that there is no difference. I am not saying there is no line. My point in asking this question is to say that there's not- yes, there's a definition to what it means to be disrespectful, but there isn't a shared a universally objective two plus two equals four shared understanding of what this being disrespectful looks like, what behaviors are considered disrespectful.

We know that a person can say something and do something and it is perceived by one other person as disrespectful and perceived by another person as perfectly acceptable and okay.

I'm asking this question for this particular situation to challenge, what your definition of disrespectful is and what are some of those other terms that you use very emphatically that you assume are very clear to others too when in fact they carry with them inherent subjectivity.



What is professional, what is not professional?

What's subordinate what is insubordinate?

As we examine these words that we use of course we have to think too what are some of those biases that are coming into that equation?

Are we using those words more frequently with women but not with men, with African Americans but not with White folks, with younger folks but not with older folks? Are some of our biases coming in there too?

When we ascribe these labels to other people, these are hard questions and they're really important.

I had a boss who really sparked this thinking for me.

I had a staff person that I was really struggling with. I reference them a lot. And I did use words like she is just so unprofessional. And my boss said to me, what do you mean by that?

It really challenged me to say yeah, what's my own stuff I'm bringing to this equation?

The next step in asking questions like this is how are we articulating this in a more objective way, meaning how can we name the behavior without ascribing the labels to it?

Instead of calling somebody or calling their behavior disrespectful or unprofessional or insubordinate, how can we flip that and simply name the behavior?

Pointing things out like saying, in yesterday's meeting you said, or you did something...much more objective?

And what did you mean by that?

Or, I noticed when you said that other people in the room- insert objective observation here. What did you make of that?

Getting them to see how they're being received and perceived.

It's important how others receive and perceive us.

None of this is simple.

If the way other people receive us and perceive us based on who we are as individuals based on any of the demographics that we bring into these offices, there's also a part that says, is this somewhere where I need to adjust myself to accommodate to the environment to the other people in my environment?



Or is this a space where I'm not doing anything wrong, and there's nothing I need to adjust to.

This is where the rubber meets the road.

My gosh, I'm full of cliches today!

But this is where really hard and really fascinating conversations come from because it is a balance, right?

We come into our workspaces like we go into any spaces where there are written policies and expectations and there are so many unwritten ones too.

We know that if we take maybe some more extreme examples that perhaps the way we speak to people at work is different than the way we speak with friends and loved ones perhaps not.

The way we dress the way... who knows?

And then in a kind of adaptation to the environment, where does it go too far that we're losing ourselves along the way? Where we start to lose authenticity and transparency and honesty and showing up as our true selves.

Where are those lines?

It's again your line and my line and your staff's line and everybody's line is different. And this is what makes these situations really challenging.

When you say disrespectful, what are you talking about? Is it the word somebody is using? Is it the tone somebody is using? Would you have the same reaction if this person were older or younger, of a different background, of a different gender of a different-demographic here? What does this mean first and foremost of being disrespectful?

The second question is a hard one, and I'm asking it anyway, or I'm asking it because it's a hard one.

How might your ego be getting in the way?

And by ego this often translates to also insecurity.

I know for me when I first started as a supervisor and all the years since there are moments when I have a bit of a knee-jerk reaction of like, because I am your supervisor, right? Which who does that serve?

Particularly in the beginning, I was in such an uncomfortable place. I didn't feel secure and confident in who I was as a supervisor.



So anything that I perceived to put a spotlight on that to be demonstrating to my team what I knew to be true, which is I'm not very good at this. I'm not doing a very good job at how I'm supervising.

My ego which was my insecurity reacted very differently in those beginning days than it did 10 years after that. But I'd be lying if I said my ego, my insecurity doesn't still show up. Of course it does.

Where is your ego? Where is your insecurity playing a part in this situation?

I am not saying this for blame. I'm saying this because we need to hold ourselves accountable for every interaction we have. What are we bringing to the interaction?

It's very easy- and I I'm quick to do it myself- this other person is doing this. That is who needs fixing. This other person is in the wrong. How do I make it right?

And it may very well be true that what this person is doing that you are calling disrespectful they shouldn't be doing based on the expectations, the policies, the way your office place works. I do not know that.

What I do know is self-reflection and ownership and accountability to say how am I contributing?

How am I contributing to my reaction? How am I contributing to not addressing it or the way in which I am addressing it how might I be making this worse?

This is another really important question to ask ourselves over and over and over again.

What role am I playing in what is going on?

What button or trigger might this person be pushing and why does it push me? Are they challenging me if we do get further information- we will get to that in a minute- where they are constantly asking why. Why do we need to do this? And why do we need to do it this way?

If you are perceiving that as a challenge to your authority, to your competence, to your knowledge, why is that a trigger for you?

Hard stuff, right?

And really, really important.

The question always is how is this impacting the work? You started out by saying this person's adjusted well, they are a quick learner. They are doing the job well, BUT... and this disrespectful part came after the but.





Outside of your feelings with what is going on, and I am not dismissing those because again, it could very well be that the behavior you're witnessing and experiencing is impacting the work. It is certainly impacting yours. But should it be and is that on this person?

I am not giving answers. I am asking questions to really honestly think about.

It sounds like her task stuff is getting done. There does not appear to be any issue there. But where it can be really informative and helpful is outside of how this person is triggering you. Is it impacting their work otherwise?

Are you not the only one experiencing these feelings, these experiences? Are other people in your team starting to have friction, which is causing tension, which is impacting the work?

Again, that could be the result of a collective type of bias. And so, we need to examine that too. It is like layer after layer after layer impacting the work. Or is this really a you issue? Is this something that is only showing up between you and this person?

So, what is the impact?

Now the pushing back.

I didn't hear in the letter, she's not doing it or she's doing it incorrectly or she's doing it late. The information we have is that she is getting the work done and she's getting it done well.

This propensity for this staff person when they are told to do something they're asking why and then they proceed to ask, why does it need to be done this way?

It sounds like in this case you are perceiving this as being disrespectful. You're perceiving this as pushing back, as perhaps being not a team player, perhaps trying to undermine your authority. (I am making some assumptions here.)

So let's try to reframe this a little bit which is, one of the most important things people need to be successful is understanding where they fit in. Where do they fit into the bigger picture?

And when people feel like they're doing something that seems pointless, that seems like a waste of time, that doesn't feel good for most people.

Often as managers, as organizations, we don't do the best job of saying, here's why this needs to be done. Here's what it looks like in the bigger picture.

This is particularly true if you're in an organization that has lots of layers of hierarchy and you're supervising people who are at the lower ends of that organizational chart.



Where they may have much less context as to the bigger picture. And they're not seeing how what they're being asked to do which might be tedious. It might be time consuming. It might be boring. It might be really hard in some way, shape, or form. It's something that they prefer to not be doing.

Where we can do our best to get ahead of moments like this in being conscious and intentional in articulating why.

Why does this need to be done?

I worked at this organization where we had grants coming from all directions. And a lot of the reporting we had to do for the grants was redundant. We were writing the same things. We were inputting the same data. We had to take attendance for the students who are attending our programs in three different databases every single day. So, of course it seems redundant, of course, it seems pointless. Except there was a reason for it.

We had different funders who used their own systems, and we were getting substantial money from each of the funders. Therefore we had to input all this information into their respective systems. Was it efficient? Of course not but there was a reason why

Things like, it's the policy is not a satisfying reason why.

Things like, that's just the way we do it here is not a satisfying why.

And if you don't have a better answer than it's the policy or this is the way we've always done it, it's a great opportunity for you to also ask, why are we doing this?

Because maybe it made sense when you first started doing it this way and it's just been done that way forever more, but it doesn't really make sense anymore.

What a great opportunity.

So be sure, be intentional, be clear about why you are asking this and then that second half of, okay now I get why we're doing it. Do we have to do it this way?

This is where that ego check can come back into play.

Because in some instances yes, there is a reason you have to do it this way. Another opportunity to say here is why. But in many cases there's lots of ways to get to the same end. And our ego or our preference or the way that we think might tell ourselves, well, this is the best way or this is the most efficient way and maybe it is or maybe it's just the best way the way you do it or it's the most efficient way that you do it.

And so it's a great opportunity again to say yeah, I guess it doesn't really matter how we get there as long as we get there.



Or there's lots of different ways we can do it, but we do need to make sure that whatever parameter might be there.

The last thing to think about is how can you use these really difficult situations to help build your relationship with this person? Where can you start to have communication around your communication? Where can you start to have some honesty to say, you know when you say this, this is what I'm hearing and I'm not sure if I'm perceiving this correctly or I feel like we have some miscommunication or we communicate really differently.

We call this meta communication- communicating about our communication.

Where is there opportunity here to start to dig in a little bit. To ask what are some things that have been challenging for you? What are some things that have been frustrating for you? What are some things that are confusing that you really don't understand what's going on? I mean it can be hard to put ourselves back in the shoes of having just started at a job. It is really overwhelming. It can be really stressful. There's so much to get acclimated to. They say it takes about a year to get really comfortable in a new position. There is a lot going on there.

Having those ongoing conversations can be really valuable in working out a lot of those bumps, and questions like what does it look like when you're frustrated?

Or what does it mean when I see you do this or I hear you say this or how will I know when you're overwhelmed or... right?

And opening those doors.

Please come to me. If you are experiencing this. Please let me know what is going on here or there.

None of this is as simple as I'm making it sound or I guess I should say as easy because these can be really hard conversations. And they are really important ones, too.

In this type of situation where you feel like one particular staff is whatever word you're putting in there.

Questioning what you are meaning by that word? Is that how other people define that word?

How your ego or insecurity might be playing a part in what's going on. How is it impacting the work? How are you letting it impact you? How you might adjust your approach and how can you use this to improve the relationship?

So those are my things that I would like to offer you to consider with this situation. I would love to hear from all of you if you have other ideas to share here to share later in the Forum to come back to another troubleshooting and talk more about it.





This is hard stuff. It is important stuff. And this is what takes you from a beginning not quite sure not quite confident supervisor to a really thriving successful competent confident leader who is being willing to put the time and effort in to working through this hard stuff.

Thank you again for being here. Thank you for being honest, open, and vulnerable to share these challenges. Believe me, we all have challenges and often very similar ones.

If you too would like to share your trouble and you can come on here live and do it, you can submit it anonymously, you can do so in the Forum lots of ways to work through some of these things together. Please do reach out.

You can email us within the supervisor Circle.

Thanks so much. I hope this was helpful and we'll see you next time!