



Hello, everybody in the Supervisor's Circle.

My name is Katherine Spinney, and I'm so happy to be with you here today for our second installment of our troubleshooting sessions.

I've learned a lot of things over my years of being a supervisor and now in the many years I've worked to support other supervisors like you and that is:

preparing before you become a supervisor is so important- reading, talking to other people, taking trainings, being part of a group like this- it's all helpful in getting you ready to be the best supervisor you can be.

AND

the real work happens once you're doing it. Once you take everything you've read, heard, learned, listened to and you put it into practice, then you realize there's so much nuance to every situation.

This is where the growth happens.

This is why I hope for as long as you are a supervisor that you continue to invest in yourself and the support that you need to grow.

There is no finish line to being an effective supervisor.

Situations are going to come up over and over and over again. It's really important that you have space, outlet, opportunity, mentors, people you can reach out to help you talk through some of those issues.

That's exactly what these sessions are for.

So let's look at today's troubleshooting trouble that was submitted.

"I have a person on my staff who I just don't like. Their performance is fine. Not great, but fine. They aren't doing anything wrong. I just don't like them. I hope this isn't showing up in how I treat them, but I imagine it might. What should I do?"

I'm guessing if you've been a supervisor for any length of time or perhaps just simply being a human being you've come across people that you just don't like.

Sometimes you can put a finger on it and sometimes you can't, There's just something about that person that rubs you the wrong way.

Now with this issue and with any of the issues we talk about in our troubleshooting sessions, people are welcome- you are welcome to submit your issue just like this and there is good reason to submit things anonymously.



Very often the issues we're dealing with are sensitive. They're private. You don't want it getting out about who you might be talking about. So if you are interested in submitting one of your own issues, then please know that you can do so just like this anonymously.

You are also invited to come on here with us and talk it through and listen to other folks share their experiences and opinions and tips. Whatever works best for you.

So in the case of just not liking someone that you work with I'm going to open myself up to something that is difficult and private to share.

I started my career working with children. I've been involved in working with children in some capacity for decades. Starting from babysitting to being a classroom teacher to working in the after-school world to volunteering and a lot of other things in between.

I love children. I love working with children. And when I first started I was really taken aback by the fact that there were some children who I absolutely loved and I didn't like being around very much.

It was not something I had heard discussed when I was preparing to be a teacher. I was embarrassed to admit that to anybody else. Because it seems like such a horrible thing to say. Who would say they didn't like a child, right? That just sounds- even as I say it out loud now- like what kind of person am I to say that there are some children that I'm much more drawn to or I connect with better than other children?

When I finally felt comfortable to bring this up with some trusted colleagues with my own supervisor, I was surprised and relieved but honestly a little horrified to know that I wasn't alone. That who we are as human beings comes with us, wherever we go. Whether we work with children or we work with adults, as human beings, there are people we are naturally drawn to and people we are naturally repelled by.

To the person who submitted this, I promise you, you are not alone.

At the very least I can empathize, I can sympathize, I can relate to this.

But I know you and I are not alone.

I know most of the supervisors who are listening and watching and here with us today can relate to this situation.

So what do you do as a supervisor when you have a staff you just don't like?

Now we only have the information in front of us. Of course, every situation has lots of nuance and details to it. We're going to work with what we have.

And what we're going to do is pull out some things to really think about for this person and for you too if this is something you've experienced.



We're going to talk about three things to consider.

The first is what don't you like?

I just said not a few minutes ago, sometimes you just can't put your finger on it. But I'm going to challenge you to try and put your finger on it.

Or really recognize in those moments when some button of yours is pushed.

What don't you like?

It's said that a lot of times the things we don't like in other people are things we don't like in ourselves.

I'm not a psychologist.

But I've heard this and I know that there's basis behind it.

I also know that very rarely is something always or never.

So even if it's true that we are often triggered, that we often notice things, we don't like in other people that we also don't like in ourselves.

That's not always the case. But let's look at it for a moment with the potential that this might be the case.

Is this person constantly interrupting other people?

Are they kind of passive aggressive?

Is the work sloppy? (Although the person did say their work is fine.)

Do they show up late sometimes?

Is their appearance a little bit off?

What exactly is it?

If you're able to a little bit more clearly put your finger on it.

Is it in fact something that you're also struggling with yourself?

If so, what a great opportunity to remind yourself that you are never going to be perfect and your staff are never going to be perfect.

You don't need to internalize it and beat yourself up.



And you don't need to externalize that and project it onto other people including your staff.

There are some things we're stronger at. There are some things we're not so good at.

Accepting ourselves, accepting our staff requires that we accept all of it.

So it could be an opportunity for some self-reflection. And a reminder that there are lots and lots of wonderful things about you.

And the things that you don't love as much don't take away from that.

Second thing to think about in terms of what you don't like along with that self-reflection is, is one of your biases showing up?

Bias shows up in lots of different ways. There are dozens of kinds of bias. Often when we use this word our minds go immediately to demographics- that we have bias around gender or race or sexual orientation.

Those things exist and that could very well be the case. And there are lots of other biases too. Biases for people who are just like us. Which means biases against people who are different.

There is an attractiveness bias. Where we tend to react more positively to people we consider attractive.

There are multiple biases out there. This is an opportunity as you think about this one staff that caused you to write and reach out.

Do you notice any patterns?

Have there been other staff throughout the years that you haven't liked or just people in your life outside of your professional life.

What draws you to people?

What repels you from people?

And what biases might be showing up there?

Once you're able to have a better understanding of what it is you don't like the second thing to consider is how might it be affecting the work.

So I intentionally didn't say your work- we'll get there in a minute- but the work because the truth is in a lot of work we do, our likeability matters.

If we are in the human service world. If this person works directly with clients in a



supportive role like as an educator or a therapist. It could be impacting their work.

Maybe you're not the only one who doesn't like this person. Maybe lots of people don't like this person.

Maybe that means they're driving clients away.

What if they're in sales where they have to build relationships and trust, but people just don't feel it with this person.

Even if you're saying that they're getting their tasks done, you did mention they're good, not great, but it sounds like they're meeting expectations. Is there something about them about their personality that is preventing them from going from good to great because they have trouble building relationships? Because people don't like working with them or people don't want to buy from them?

It is helpful to think about how it might be impacting their work.

Now we'll get to your work.

It's really hard to fake liking somebody. I knew this as a teacher, as a supervisor, as a human being. In many cases we have that gut instinct, sixth sense and intuition when people really like being around us and when they don't no matter how hard we might try to pretend or mask it. There's a pretty good chance that something's coming through.

So, how can you continue to be an effective supervisor to this person?

Based on what you're saying that they're doing the job. How can you continue to support them? Let them know that you care about them as a person and a professional even if you don't like them very much.

Where might your favoritism show up?

Are you not giving this person the praise they deserve because you don't like them.

Are you not taking the time to get to know them better and to build a stronger relationship with them because you don't like them?

Then you're making your rounds around the office, do not stop by their office.

Are they not getting the promotion or raise they deserve?

It's really important for you to check yourself and make sure that because this person as you say isn't doing anything wrong that your dislike for them isn't getting in the way of what they need to continue to grow.

This isn't the particular issue that you wrote in about but I think it opens up some



important questions for all of us to ask ourselves when it comes to the relationships we build with our teams, with our colleagues, with our own supervisors, with our clients.

With the many, many people who we work with and interact with every day. Our humanness doesn't go away when we walk through that office door.

Our penchant for who we like and who we don't, the way we like to joke, the shows we watch, the books we read, and how we want to discuss them when we come to work- all of those things are a part of us.

It's important as supervisors as best we can knowing that we can't ever do it perfectly. It's trying to find that balance when we have staff that we don't like

On the flip side, it's quite probable that there are staff who don't like us either.

Is that okay?

Can we still make it work?

Is there a way that we can have an understanding maybe spoken or unspoken and lots of cases where we might not be the best of friends? We might not choose to be around each other outside of work. But here we are. We're on the same team. We're professionals. We're going to do the best that we can to reach our goals.

The fact that we don't like one another or it could be mutual. It could be one-sided. Is it going to get in the way of the work?

It's also important to think about what happens if your staff really likes you or if you really like your staff.

How do you keep those boundaries in check?

Where it's very common- it's happened to me a ton- where staff will want to connect with me in some way shape or form outside of the work day.

I've gotten Facebook friend requests. I've gotten LinkedIn requests. I've gotten all kinds of things on social media. I've been invited to graduation parties and weddings. I've gone to funerals.

There are all of these boundaries, and they're very rarely as clear as we try to make them when we talk about boundaries or have videos about boundaries. My own included. I own up to that.

I made a decision when I became a supervisor where I said, it's LinkedIn or nothing for me in the social media realm if my staff wants to reach out to me and connect with me on LinkedIn- it's ostensibly a professional platform- I feel comfortable doing that. But any other social media the answer is no.



And I've had staff reach out who I quite like and it would be fun to be friends with them on social media, but to keep that consistent. I have the same response with everybody.

So be careful of those boundaries that might show up at work, but also that might start to creep into outside of work.

Particularly nowadays when technology and social media is everywhere and lots of people are working from home or in a hybrid environment. The divisions, the actual physical boundaries between work and home have been really clouded.

Other things to consider here are work sanctioned or not necessarily work sanctioned but things that happen outside of working hours things like happy hours or going to a baseball game.

What kinds of messages are you sending?

Who goes, who doesn't go, who feels pressure to go? Who are you sitting next to? Who are you not sitting next to? And even during the work day if you have a kitchen or an office. Who's having coffee together? Who's not having coffee together? Who's stopping by whose offices?

Not only can the optics be damaging if your staff starts to think that you're playing favorites with certain people, but by the sheer nature of spending extra time with certain people then naturally you get to know them better.

You might fall into a pattern where those are the folks who are getting promoted.

Those are the folks who are getting raises at the literal expense and also figurative expense of other staff.

I'm not even getting into romantic relationships and those sorts of boundaries. That's another story and often much more clear.

The other thing to throw in here is in many cases and I'm sure some of you are in this camp where you have become promoted and are now the supervisor are of people who were once your colleagues.

And what now?

People who you already go to yoga on Saturdays together, you're already in the same book club. You're already friends on Facebook.

So now what?

What do you do with that relationship?



We talked so much in this work about how important it is to build strong positive relationships with your staff.

And that of course is true.

But our humanness gets in the way a lot.

Our natural tendency to like some people over others, to have more in common with others, to have more to talk about, to share similar communication styles, or even similar values.

As a supervisor, how do you balance this all?

You need to do the work, both the internal and the external, self-reflect and think about staff you seem to really like, staff you really don't.

Why are you drawn to the staff you're drawn to? Why are you repelled by the staff you're repelled by? What might that say about you? How might it impact your leadership? And how might it be shining a light on your biases?

Also, no matter how self-aware, we try to be, no matter how much work we put in to being self-aware, there are always blind spots.

And I just contradicted myself because I said most things are rarely never or always but I'm putting this always in here intentionally. There are always blind spots.

Who is in your circle that you can reach out to to get to know better how those biases might be showing up or how you might be playing favorites?

How can you ask your staff directly in a way that you might have a really fruitful, honest, open conversation?

That external feedback. The people who experience how you're showing up.

It's impossible for you to know that on your own. You have to hear it from them.

But there does have to be a lot of trust to have those conversations so that they are honest conversations and you can start working on improving how you build relationships with your team.

Another thing to remember it's not on the list, but it's a forever reminder- it's important for you to be aware of these things. It's important for you to work hard to overcome what gets in your way of supervising well.

And cut yourself a break.

It's natural to like some people, it's natural to not like some people.



It doesn't make you a horrible person.

It makes you human and it might get in the way of you becoming the leader that you really want to be.

So take the information for what it is. You don't need to judge it and beat yourself up over it. But take that information, the feedback, the awareness, and the knowledge and do the best that you can to continue working through those relationships. The easy ones and the hard ones and to continue to support each and every staff that you can as best you can.

I would love to hear your thoughts as well.

If you have some other things to add some tips advice or strategies. I'll post this question in the forum as well. So please do share your thoughts.

And if you would like your trouble to be shot here in troubleshooting, you can reach out emails the best way send us an email at info@supervisorscircle.com and let us know if you'd like it to be submitted anonymously like today or if you'd like to come on and talk it through while we're live. Whatever is most comfortable and helpful for you. We would love to help you work through that problem or that issue and we all have them and we all need the space to be able to work through them.

I thank you for joining us today.

I hope this was helpful. Thank you to the person who submitted the issue. I know it's not an easy one. I hope that this helped you work through and think about some next steps.

So thank you to all of you and I look forward to seeing you next time.