



Hello supervisors!

Good evening. Good morning. Good afternoon. Whatever time it is where you are, whether you're joining live or watching this as a recorded session, welcome to our first ever Supervisors Circle troubleshooting session.

We just opened our virtual doors last week, and we are kicking off our live series with this first event- troubleshooting.

Now as we start to get comfortable in The Supervisors Circle, we're going to be trying lots of different things to see what works best for you. We have a couple of these scheduled already on the calendar. So please do check the calendar for dates that work for you and we'll see if this style works for you. If not, we'll get some feedback and we'll adjust it and we'll try something else.

This is a grand experiment to make sure that you are getting everything you want and need out of this community.

One thing I know whether it's this platform or this style or something else where we try to troubleshoot our issues, what I know for sure is that this is a central part of the work in being a strong supervisor.

You can read every management book- on the planet and some days it feels like I have- you can go to every training, watch every video, attend every conference, and there's really valuable information to be had there.

I'm not in any way suggesting that you should not prepare and study and learn ahead of time the many, many things you'll need to do as a supervisor.

What I'm saying is you need to learn that stuff and most of that stuff you can't do until you're actually doing it.

This is part of what makes being a supervisor so challenging. I use an analogy or an example a lot of times with things like learning a language, learning a musical instrument, learning a new recipe. These are all things that you can practice by yourself in the comfort of your own home before you have to do it in front of someone else or with someone else.

If you're learning a language you can practice in front of a mirror, you can do exercises.

If you're trying a new recipe, you can cook it over and over and over again before you serve it to someone else.

If you're learning an instrument you can practice, practice before you play for someone else.

But much of what you do as a supervisor, there's really no way to do it until you do it.



You can't really practice facilitating a meeting.

You can't really practice giving someone critical feedback.

I mean, there are ways to role play and there are exercises that you can do. But ultimately for most of us the first time we ever have the opportunity to practice these supervisor skills is live. It's in the moment.

And that's really hard.

So when we learn these wonderful skills, we attend these great workshops. we go to these amazing conferences, we read these insightful books- that's great preparation.

What happens then is we take what we've learned, what we've heard, what we've watched, and we put it into practice. Then we say, 'wow, that did not go so well, let's think about it. Let's reflect. Let's get some feedback. Let's talk about why it didn't go so well' or 'Hey, that went even better than I thought so why did it go so well, let's pick that apart and how can we replicate this for the next time?'

I find that these opportunities to both self-reflect and to get some feedback from other people really central to your learning and growth as a supervisor. It's not just taking in the knowledge. It's taking that knowledge, putting it into practice, reflecting, figuring out what went well, what didn't and then adjusting the next time. That's what these troubleshooting sessions are all about.

I also got this idea when the pandemic first hit. I wasn't doing anything virtual. Everything I was doing was in person and like lots of people and lots of businesses, I had to completely adjust and go a hundred percent online. I tried lots of different things and tried to figure out how to best continue to serve this community and I ended up developing some virtual courses. A lot of those videos you'll see here in the Supervisors Circle.

And if I do say so myself, I was quite proud of the courses. I thought the content was on point. There were all these really useful resources that people could download and I started running some of these courses where people went through them on their own and then once a week would meet in person.

Every group I did this with without fail I'd say, 'what's working for you. What's not working for you? What do you want to adjust?' And they would all say that the weekly get togethers were the absolute gold mine of the course.

For a moment, I felt a little bit some type of way about it. Like what do you mean? I put all this time into these videos and these resources and they certainly weren't saying those were without value. But what I learned from that experience was the opportunity to connect and talk and reflect and process what's going on for you- that's where the growth really happens.



That's ultimately what motivated me to start the Supervisors Circle. It's not just about resources. It's not just about trainings, though again, those are an important part. It's how you can work with other people and hear their experiences, listen to their insight, share your own experience and perspective and insight, and go through this as a community. Because it's hard and it really, really helps to walk alongside other people.

In some iteration, maybe we'll keep it like this. Maybe we'll try a different format. But I think it's important that we hold on to some version of being able to troubleshoot and help each other work through some of the many, many challenges that pop up when we are supervisors.

We're going to start our first troubleshooting that is really a big challenge. We're starting big. Why not, right?

This is an issue that unfortunately even though it's big and heavy I do not think is so rare. This was someone who came to me with this issue and they did not want to come on live.

We'll talk about that later- the different ways you can get your troubleshoot- I'm going to keep trying to figure out what the grammar is around using that term- so we'll talk about that.

But I guess I can talk about it now too, which is if you want your issue to be raised here and listen to the group and talk about different experiences and advice to get from other people, you can submit it like this anonymously, you don't even need to show up to the group you can watch it later and we'll talk about it and we'll discuss it and we'll come up with some ideas and afterwards in the forum we'll open it up for people to further add their insight and thoughts.

Also, you have the option to come on camera here and talk about the issue yourself and in a live format, ask questions, answer questions, talk with others to help you work through it. So whatever's most comfortable for you.

This first one is with someone who did not want to come on camera, which I completely respect. It is still a little weird for me if I'm being fully honest. So here's the issue-

"One of my staff is really struggling. She has a lot going on in her personal life and it has affected her work. She shows up late, misses deadlines, and needs constant reminders for everything. Unfortunately for reasons I can't / won't get into, my boss says we can't fire her right now. How do I keep working with her?"

Raise your hand if you have experienced this before or are currently experiencing this. I know this person is not the only one and I know it for sure because this has happened to me, too.

This is something where a lot of organizations are really struggling to hold on to staff. They're really struggling to hire new staff.



There are a lot of situations for a lot of reasons many of which we are never quite privy to about why we can't fire someone or why a boss doesn't want to fire someone.

We might not always know the reason why and sometimes we don't have any agency to do what we might want to do in this situation, whether it's firing, whether it's moving them to another supervisor, whether it's giving them a leave of absence or maybe switching positions.

Sometimes we have that flexibility and sometimes we don't.

When it comes to actually letting someone go, sometimes we have that authority and sometimes we don't. In this particular situation this person does not.

Let's break it down a little bit.

If you're in this situation or in a similar situation some things for you to consider and to the person who submitted this for you to consider as you're working your way through this really challenging and not so uncommon situation- the first thing you need to do with most everything- this will probably be included in every things to consider or think about whatever the issue is being raised. This is probably going to be number one in most situations that we're talking about because of course you have to know both your laws what the legal implications and ramifications are of your particular situation and also policies that are particular to your organization.

As I talk to all of you who are all over the country, we know that that means that there are different laws and every state's a little bit different. Sometimes every county is a little different. Every city can be a little different. Certainly every organization has their own policies that are different.

Many of you are working in a place that has a legitimate HR so they should be aware of what the laws and policies are.

Many of you work in places that don't really have an HR or you have someone in HR who's not really a trained HR professional. This has been my experience before. I've sat in meetings with someone who HR was one tenth of their job description and when they sat in meetings, it was nice to have another presence when there were legal issues involved, but at the same time I didn't necessarily feel covered because this person knew barely more than I did about what these laws and policies were.

Whether or not you have an HR it's important for your own protection, for your organization's protection, for the protection of your staff to make sure that you're aware of what the laws and policies are.

In this particular case knowing what the policies and laws are around firing. Most states are at will states which means that people can get fired for any reason, but it's not really any reason.



You want to make sure that you're not firing someone because of their inclusion in certain protected classes.

You can't for example fire someone because they're a woman or because they're African-American, right? That doesn't cover you under an at-will state. It's not any reason. You do have to be aware of what the limitations of that are.

Even if you are in an at will state almost every organization is going to want you to have some paper trail, some documentation of what the issue is and what you've tried to do to remedy it. Even if it doesn't necessarily seem like you have to or you want to or it's causing you a lot of extra work. It does protect you. Hopefully legally.

It does protect your staff just to show that they're not being targeted for any discriminatory practice, for being a whistleblower. All these many, many laws that impact us in the workplace. It's the best practice. You don't want to work for an organization that just fires people at will literally and figuratively without good reason. There are a lot of negative repercussions to that. You want to make sure if you're letting someone go that it is for good reason, that it's not something personal, it's not something petty.

Being fired is really impactful for people and it can be really damaging financially and emotionally. There's a lot that goes into it.

We'll talk more about that further down the road.

The other thing that I think is really important to think about is something that I think a lot of us aren't necessarily aware of when we first become supervisors and that is that there are people in our organizations who are receiving what's known as reasonable accommodations to do their jobs that are accommodated based on a documented disability.

I started my career as a K-12 teacher. So I was very familiar with this concept of students being in special education, of having IEPs of receiving accommodations. I was very familiar with this concept in a K-12 setting with children.

Once I became a university professor, I initially wasn't aware that these accommodations can carry over while you're an adult in a university setting. That's something I had to learn.

When I became a supervisor, I also had to learn that with staff who have documented disabilities that they can receive again what's known as reasonable accommodations to perform their job duties.

These disabilities again, there's a lot of legal implication to this. So don't go by me verbatim. I'm giving you big broad strokes of what this is about but most certainly for you to talk with your HR and become more familiar with how this works. But the broad strokes general description is that these disabilities can be physical and they





can be mental.

It's not just what we might stereotypically think of as someone in a wheelchair who has access to a ramp or a restroom that they can use while they're in the working environment.

That is an example, but it is but one of many.

Because there's a lot of legal implication around this you are not going to be privy to the specifics of your staff's medical conditions. What you will be made aware of if your staff receives reasonable accommodations is what those accommodations are that you need to accommodate or implement.

Don't worry about finding out the details that you don't need to find out and that legally you have no right to find out. I know we get curious about things but there's a lot of confidentiality and there's a lot of protection for people's medical history.

If your HR tells you that someone is going to work a different schedule or they need some extra time on something or whatever the case may be then it's not something for you to negotiate or argue or ask. 'Why? What's wrong with them?' and 'What is the reason that they get this?'

It's not your business quite frankly.

Be aware that there may be staff that you're supervising right now who have reasonable accommodations. What's a reasonable accommodation? That's a whole other conversation because that language is as loose as that- reasonable accommodations.

In most cases, you're not the one to decide what's considered reasonable or not. These are legal terms and definitions. Make sure that somebody in your organization- if you have an organizational attorney, certainly your HR that they're following the letter of the law.

Know that you may be supervising staff who receive said accommodations now.

With this example we're talking about today. is it the case where something's going on with this person? We don't know and it's not our business to know or ask.

If they are receiving accommodations for some of the challenges that they're experiencing then that's something we would need to know and I don't know if that's the case here.

Knowing that, what you can do with that information is also if you know that your staff if they disclose to you or that they have disability and they could benefit from some accommodations in the workplace, they might not know either that they can get that documented with HR to receive those accommodations.



As a leader, as an advocate for your staff that might be something that you might offer to your staff who isn't aware of what their rights are.

This also may be true for you.

If you have a disability that you could benefit from some accommodations in the workplace in order to work better and more effectively and comfortably then that's a conversation you can have with your HR as well to get the accommodations that you are legally entitled to.

When there's something going on with staff just know that you might not know the whole picture. And one of the things that they said in this submission was they have a lot going on personally.

With staff's personal lives this isn't always illegal definition, but it can be a tricky leadership definition or an ethical definition in terms of how much you know about your staff's personal lives and what is going on with them personally.

You're gonna have staff who really want to keep their personal life separate from their professional life. They might tell you something's going on and that's the end of it or they might not even say that much. They might not even want to mention their personal life to you.

On the other end you might have staff who tell you everything about their personal life in a way that you feel might cross a boundary for you that it's a little too personal. So a lot of those lines are not legal lines. They're lines for you to determine for your own self for your staff to determine for them for their own selves and certainly these lines will be different from staff to staff to staff which is part of being accommodating and flexible to adjust to what your staff need from you.

Something to consider with this case where it says that she has a lot going on in her personal life that factors into how you approach this.

Is this a staff who before whatever personal was going on? Did they meet their deadlines, were they meeting expectations, is this a temporary something while they're trying to work through whatever these personal things are and you have every confidence to believe that once this personal issue works itself out that they'll be back to form?

That's a really different situation. Then this is a staff who always showed up this way who never really met deadlines or expectations, and now they're using this personal situation to explain why, when really this has been their performance all along.

How do you approach this when you know that something personal is going on and it's showing up in the workplace?

Again, depending on where you are, you might have some



agency to give this person some time off, to reduce their hours, to give them some different responsibilities for a while or you might not. There are a lot of factors depending on where you work.

This is a reminder. This is probably another bullet you'll see every single time we talk about an issue is continuing to lead with empathy.

This can be hard when you're really frustrated with the staff, when you're working really hard and you're doing everything you can to fulfill your expectations and you're managing a staff who isn't. Who then in turn is causing you extra work/

You're having meetings. There's performance plans. You're having to pick up the slack for what they're doing. There can be a lot of human understandable frustration with staff of not wanting to work with them, of not wanting to continue to invest all this time in them when you don't have that time to begin with and you have your job to do and now you have part of their job to do and they're not pulling their weight and isn't that frustrating? They should be a professional and why aren't they, right?

It's easy to get really frustrated by that.

I'm not going to tell you not to get frustrated. It's a human, natural emotion and reaction to what is a frustrating situation.

What I am going to challenge you to do is to continue to lead with empathy.

Maybe you're someone who never misses a deadline, you always show up on time. You are an A+ performer and kudos to you.

Empathy is not expecting everybody to be just like you.

Empathy is understanding where someone else is coming from. From their point of view, from their point of reference, from their situation, from their values and beliefs.

Empathy is not putting yourself in their shoes and deciding what you would do in that situation. That's not empathy- that's role play.

Empathy is saying, how can I best understand where this person is coming from through their frame of reference, through their thinking, through their beliefs, through their values. Even if you are at your boiling point and you're so frustrated with this person, they're still dealing with something. Something you may know the details of or not. It doesn't matter.

You can, you should, you need to continue to be a human being and lead with empathy. 'How are you doing? How are you feeling? How did this week go for you?'

If you haven't already had some difficult





conversations, have some difficult conversations. Address it. Don't pretend it's not there. It's there. It's not going to go away by pretending. It's not there. You confront it.

'Hey, I know you're going through a really tough time. I want to support you as your supervisor. I'm also trying to get all this stuff done to continue to serve our clients. How can I support you through this time?

Continue to lead with empathy. Some days that's going to be harder than others. Those are the days where your leadership really kicks in.

Remember that while you're having this difficult time, so are they.

How can you continue to support them and do the best you can?

This is the last thing to consider and I know now that I look at these in a list- these are the most broad. We could use these three to talk about any issue.

But maybe there's a lesson here.

Because even though every situation is different, even though there's nuance and specifics to every situation we're going to talk about, there's also some best practices that are important to remember no matter what the situation

Do the best you can.

It's logical and it's really hard for people who want to do everything at a high level no matter what.

If you're in a situation as a supervisor like this situation where you have a staff who is not meeting expectations and for whatever reason- there could be many- you can't let them go. You have to continue to work with them.

You need to do the best you can.

You have to let go of the 'but they should', 'but only if', 'but, but...'

I get it. I get it.

You can only do what you can do.

If you continue to escalate your frustration every single day when this person is late or misses a deadline or this behavior that continues to repeat, it's not going to change their behavior. It's only going to continue to frustrate you.

You need to have an expectation that you can only control what you can control.



As a supervisor, as a human being you have to do the best that you can.

When they miss the next deadline or they show up late again, then you can reflect and say was there anything I could have done to help reach a different outcome?

Sometimes yes, many times no.

Many times it's out of your control.

Being a supervisor doesn't mean you're a puppet master. If you just set the right boundary or you just have the right conversation that everything's gonna fall into line the way that you want.

It doesn't work that way.

In addition to the acceptance, one thing for you to think about- and this can be really hard to for high performers-is there something you can do differently? Something you can adjust to better the chances that this person is going to meet those expectations?

I'm going to give you an example.

As someone who is pretty organized, is pretty good with deadlines, has lots of systems in place to make sure that things get done as expected. It has always been challenging to me to work with people who are not that way, who maybe are don't have systems in place or their deadlines are a little more fluid, let's say.

In this one particular position, I was a director of a team of 10- a wonderful, wonderful team. There was so much going on every minute of every day. It was the busiest job I've ever had- just a constant million things to do.

When I first started working there and there were a million things to do when I walked through the door and one of the many things we had to do was to have our grant reports in at a certain time so we could get funding to run our program.

So I sent the staff an email- this is when the grant reports are due. I sent them a calendar invite. It was on their calendars and that was that.

A couple of weeks later when the first grant report was due, I look at my inbox and I have not one grant report in there.

The organized me said, 'well, I sent them the email and it's in their calendar. So there's really no reason it shouldn't be turned in on time.'

And guess what? Not one person turned it in on time.

I followed up and said what's going on with the grant. 'Oh, I didn't I didn't get a



reminder.' 'I didn't know.' 'I forgot.'

Feeling frustrated, I wanted it to be different. I kept telling myself, 'It's not my job to send you a reminder. You're a professional figure it out.'

In a perfect world, that's true. But in the reality this was my staff. And in many ways they were a really wonderful staff. They weren't so great with being organized around their deadlines.

I had a choice to make.

I could stand on my principles and say no, I'm not setting reminders. Figure it out. Figure out a system. Stay on top of your calendar.

And you know what, that would have gotten me late grant reports.

So what I started doing a week before, a day before, I set up reminders to send to the staff. And guess what? I got my grant reports on time. Most of the time. No system is going to be perfect.

It was a bit of a challenge for me because I still hold that principle of like I shouldn't have to remind you, right? You're a professional- get it together and follow your deadlines.

But it didn't get me what I needed and it ended up causing me more frustration and more work because then I had to follow up or I had to do the grant report. I did all this chasing around.

As my father always says, don't bite off your nose to spite your face, right? For me to say, okay, I'm gonna send people reminders of things and when I can do it automatically through Outlook or other systems, even better.

And again, it won't be perfect but much, much more effective to get what I needed on time. What I would share with this person and any of you who have those moments of- but I shouldn't have to do this.

Are there things that you can implement whether it's reminders, whether it's follow-ups, whether it's providing a list of priorities for people to do- whatever the case may be. Is there something you can put in place that is going to help your staff meet those expectations? Even if you feel like you shouldn't have to do that.

I encourage you to involve your staff in that conversation.

'Hey, I noticed that you've missed the last couple of deadlines. We really need to make sure that we're getting our grant reporting in on time so we can receive the money to run our programs. What do you need in order to turn these in on time?'



They might know themselves really well and say 'I just need to...' or 'I need help with...'

And you can provide it.

Sometimes they'll say 'I don't know' or 'I've always been this way' or 'I don't know. I just forget' or whatever the case may be.

Certainly involve them in that conversation.

I know there is this perpetual fear of micromanaging. But sometimes what we call micromanaging is managing.

You're not going to work with every staff the same way.

If you have staff who's on top of everything, you don't need to send them the reminders. But if you have staff who need reminders to get their stuff in on time, that's not micromanaging that's managing.

I have no doubt you'll see these three same points over and over again, but it's because they are central to whatever issue you're dealing with and as you see we start to flesh out what this looks like with these particular situations, but consider this standing advice whatever issue pops up that 1) you know the laws and policies 2) that you always lead with empathy, and 3) that you do the best you can.

I'll be curious to see if you have some additional thoughts, insight, advice, experience.

I'm going to put something in the forum so that people can continue to add to this conversation.

I want to invite you if you want your trouble shot- it doesn't work with the grammar, right? I have to figure out how to say this- but if you want your trouble shot again, if you want to come on camera and talk about it. If you want to submit something anonymously, you can always post it in the forum too, but let us know.

Send a message through the contact form, call, email, post something in the forum.

We'll be happy to work with you.

Again most things aren't a quick, here's what you need to do and everything's going to be fine. A lot of troubleshooting is talking through it and exploring options and helping you maybe see it in a different way and then you try it and maybe it works and maybe it doesn't and then you continue to talk about it and reflect and get feedback. Very few things have an easy answer.

Even if you get that answer, even if we say try this resource, try this strategy try this tip, and you do it and it works amazing and you come back and say, it worked!



Later down the road, you have another staff and it's a similar situation and you try the same thing and it doesn't work.

Welcome to being a supervisor, right?

Let us know if you have a trouble you want to shoot and we will welcome that and work with you and sympathize and empathize.

We're all here because we've had our own troubles. We continue to have them. It's all part of the process of becoming a thriving leader, an effective supervisor and no matter how thriving and effective you are, there's always another challenge down the road. We will be here with you to help you through it.

Thanks so much for joining. I hope this was helpful for you and look forward to seeing you next time.