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

These sessions are an opportunity to work through some of the challenges that we experience as supervisors, no matter how long we've been doing this. And even though each challenge we face is unique and has its own nuance, I find that no matter how unique or how specific the details might be, that we can relate to other people's challenges. There's always a component that we can say, yep, that sounds familiar, or I'm going through something similar, or I have gone through something similar, and here's some encouragement or advice I might be able to offer.

You can always do that here live. You can share your own challenge, you can share your encouragement or advice to other people's challenges. You can do it after the fact in the forum. Lots of ways to participate in this process. Like everything else we do here in the Supervisors circle, there are lots of opportunities to do this within community.

We know that being a supervisor is often a really isolating and lonely place to be. That for lots of practical and important reasons, there's a limit to who you can talk to about what, and there's a lot of things you cannot and should not be talking to your team members about. In some cases, there are things that you maybe are not comfortable talking to your own supervisor about. We want to create those spaces that you do have someone to talk to them about. That's why we're here.

So, let's go ahead and talk about our trouble today.

"I used to manage a small team of three people, and one of my favorite things to do was celebrate with them. Birthdays, work anniversaries, et cetera. Now I've taken on an additional team and was hoping to carry on the tradition, but with 14 team members, it seems impossible to keep up with it all. I don't want to lose the celebratory team spirit, but I'm drowning here. What do you suggest?"

Full disclosure. I chose this one to talk about today because with that celebratory spirit, today is the first anniversary to the day of the Supervisors Circle, and that is worth celebrating. A whole year! I can't believe it. Like a lot of things that are related to time, there are days where it feels like we've been here forever. There are days that feel like we just started yesterday. It's an accomplishment. There's been a lot of time, effort, and figuring out how to do this thing, do this thing together. A lot of things behind the scenes, a lot of things on stage. Working through some of the technology kinks. There are always technology kinks and trying to constantly build and grow this community in a way that is valuable and that we're all trying to support one another and help each other learn and grow.

I want to take a moment to celebrate this community and celebrate one another. It's important that we have this celebratory spirit as supervisors, that we recognize the value in celebration, in recognition. It is foundational to how we support our teams. There's a lot of research out there. You know, I go back to Gallup time and time again, but, outside of Gallup, within Gallup, the research is really consistent. That people need to feel valued in the work that they're doing. They need to feel appreciated to stick around. And

one of the, excuse me, one of the data points I go back to over and over again is they say when people leave a job and they ask through exit interviews and research and studies, why did you leave your job?

There's rarely one reason, but one of the reasons is almost always lack of recognition. In fact, the data point that comes up over and over again, that over 70% of people say that lack of recognition is one of the major reasons that they leave their positions. It's really important as a supervisor, as a team leader, that you're being intentional, that you're being authentic, that you are recognizing the value that your team provides on a core level as it pertains to their performance.

And what about this other stuff? So yes, you need to celebrate, recognize, value, their performance. What about this other stuff that this person is writing about? In addition to performance, that's absolute baseline, non-negotiable, you need to let your team members know how much you value and appreciate them recognize the good work they're doing. What about the other stuff? Birthdays.

So you have the, I love the example here because it lets us dig in a little bit. You have the work-related stuff, which is like a work anniversary, it could be a promotion, things that are directly related to work. Then you have the out of work stuff. To this person's point, even on a three-person team, can start to really grow over the years. I have a really similar story because in my first supervisory position, I supervised two people and then in my next position, I had 10.

So that, that leap I felt it really significantly. Over the course of a few years of supervising 10 people, and they were at that age, kind of late twenties, early thirties, couple in their later thirties where it felt like it was a lot of, these big life moments where we had a lot of engagements and then marriages and, and pregnancies and births and buying first homes. Then with people of all ages, we had deaths in the family, which of course, this is not part of celebratory, but recognizing things that were going on in people's lives. Then we had instances, I remember the first time one of my staff's pets died and I was like, oh, what, what do, what do I do? Like, do I buy them flowers because someone's grandmother just died? And that felt very significant. We got them a card and we sent them flowers and then somebody's dog died. And that's significant too, but it's not really a policy and like it just is like so much. Then there was stuff that was popping up that was like, okay, then someone just got into grad school so that feels really significant and we should recognize that. Then someone else, it wasn't grad school, but they got a certification online, so like, we should probably recognize that too. It just went and went and went.

I really feel this question. It just felt kind weird to be like, well, this is worthy of celebrating, but does this meet the threshold of celebrating? Which is like, that's not a nice place to be, right?

To decide who deserves and what deserves to be celebrated. Like that just felt weird and a little unnatural. Like, let's create a policy that if you get married, we should celebrate that. But I, I don't know, it just felt a little weird.

Let's dig into this a little bit and talk about how you might, how you might navigate this.

So, here's some things to consider. You know, I'm never going to outright tell you what to do in most cases, but let's look at some of these things to consider.

The first is of course, what a great opportunity to involve your team in this discussion. In most cases, you're going to get lots of opinions and lots of ideas. And this is the beauty, the challenge, the joy of working on a team. When you're soliciting ideas from a team, whatever it is that you end up deciding, even if it's not completely consensus and understanding of that is when one person leaves and another person joins, that might really tip the balance. You might not revisit the conversation every time someone comes and goes. But over time, if your team really starts to shift that that original 14 is now 3, 4, 5 members different, then it might be worth revisiting that conversation.

You know, so little of this is hard and fast, which adds to the challenge, which is why we do this troubleshooting. because it's a lot to think about. It's a lot to work through.

What a great conversation to have with your team. What a great ongoing conversation to have with your team. What do they think about this? What do they think? How do they want to go about celebrating and what do they want those celebrations to look like?

I remember one of the positions, my first position out of grad school, we had this it was a little bit tiered actually. It ended up being tiered in a lot of ways that divided the team and didn't feel good for lots of people involved. But we had our bigger team and then we were divided into different sites, and then we had the full-time folks and the part-time folks. That was a big delineation because the part-time folks, by the nature of not being there all day every day, weren't able to participate in a lot of things we were doing organizationally because they weren't there for all of them.

Logistically they understood that. But what ended up happening on the celebratory front was, the way they did birthdays was they had this one burger place, and they would take people to this burger place. It was always on a Monday for some reason, but they only took the people who were full-time. That was kind of weird. One of the, I think it was the part-timers, maybe it was one of the full-timers, I don't remember. Someone spoke up at one point and said, this is kind of weird, like, we're a team. Everybody's birthday should be celebrated. But it was a fairly big team. I think we had 15, 16 maybe right in this ballpark of what this person had. So, it did kind of feel like we were constantly going out for Burger Mondays. Then it was kind of like, well instead of always going to the same place for Burger Mondays, why don't we let the birthday person decide?

Then it became like a whole thing because it was like the coordination and organizing and scheduling. Because they were part-time, we were really limited with how we could make it work because of the hours and then like were paying them to celebrate the birthday? A lot of other things started popping up that that didn't come into play with the full-time folks, which is not at all to say we shouldn't have celebrated their birthday or we shouldn't have paid them for it, or we shouldn't have given them the option to go

for Greek or Mexican or something else besides Burger Mondays. It's to say that it can get complicated very quickly in a way we don't think about. What happens a lot with, with things like this is the idea of it is great and, and the idea of it is... what am I trying to say?

The intention is important and, in many times, and in many ways, we want to fulfill that intention even with the headaches and the coordination and all the challenges that go along with it. In other instances, we may decide that there are so many headaches and so many logistics and so many challenges that we just can't make it work or we can't make it work in this iteration. Maybe we can't do a full lunch for everybody, but we do recognize that we should be celebrating everyone's birthday, so we're going to adjust it a little bit and we're going to do it by month. Now we include the part-timers, we include everybody,
but instead of doing it birthday by birthday, we do it month by month.

That's a little bit of a compromise, I guess everyone gets included, but it makes it possible and a little less time consuming something like that. I don't want it to be an all or nothing, like it's a good idea so we're going to do it no matter what, no matter how, this sort of sunken costs like we've already decided, or we've put time into it, so we're going to keep doing it no matter how many problems it causes.

Or also, we're just not going do anything at all because it's just too complicated. There is space in the middle to say, okay, it's hard to do it exactly the way we want to do it, or we had hoped to do it and we also don't want to get rid of this thing altogether. Also let's hear from the team and let's hear how they think that this might work and how they want to go about it.

What can get challenging bringing in the team is people like to celebrate different things and people like to be celebrated differently.

This is great information to have in terms of performance because you do want to recognize and celebrate people as they want to be celebrated. In terms of all that other stuff, it can get a little awkward too because if you have people who are having some big life event outside of work, so for example, someone's getting married and you're wondering like, should we throw them a shower or should we get them a gift? Should we do something?

One person really wants that to happen, and another person really doesn't. It kind of gets a little like, uh, um so thinking through how you're going to maneuver this and also to think again through how those tiers work and where some of that internal hierarchy comes into play and how to check yourself where you might not be aware that some of those power dynamics are impacting who's getting celebrated and in what way.

I have an example that really rubbed me the wrong way that I was grateful I was able to use my voice and I was grateful that I had a supervisor who was open to hearing it. I was teaching part-time at a school and all the teachers were part-time. It was an adult education nonprofit. Because we were all part-time, we knew each other in passing, but

it was a lot of coming and going every semester. There were some new faces and some that were there every semester, but a lot of part-time. And this came up a lot because the teachers were part-time and we knew each other kind of, and everyone had other stuff going on.

Things would come up of people getting married and babies and, degrees and houses and all these celebratory things. Very often it was just that it was like an email or like, let's celebrate or let's share a congratulations to this person and people would share their congratulations. Then one of the, our like boss's boss' boss kind of higher up the chain was having a baby, which is great and was a scenario that a lot of the teachers had too. An email went around like, Hey, can everyone chip in? Not every, I, I think it was more if you'd like to chip in for a gift, here's how you can go about doing that. And there was also a mention that there was like a party, but we weren't really invited to the party. It's just sort of a, eh, I didn't love it. So, I reached out to my supervisor and was kind of like, you know, we've had lots of teachers and people kind of on our level who've had kids, and no one got a present and no one asked anyone to chip in and no one had a party. I get that they're the boss, but I just didn't love the, like they're getting paid way more than we are and they're not chipping in for gifts for us, but you're asking us to chip in for gifts for them. I just didn't like the implication or the reverse power dynamics there. I didn't appreciate that.

So really thinking about, and that's something that came up for me a lot when I was managing teams of like, do I have to get gifts for my staff? So like birthdays and holidays and depending on your industry, if it's like nurse's appreciation week or admin professionals' appreciation week or, or whatever your field is, what do you do about gifts? Are there rules, protocols? Is there a culture around gift giving? Because that can also take up a lot of time and money and energy on your end, but also on your staff's end. Like, do they feel like they have to get you a gift? Are they constantly being expected to get gifts for other people?

A lot of things that when we talk about team culture, those unwritten rules or those expectations that can put people in really uncomfortable positions that they show up to a luncheon or an event or even just a regular day at work and everyone has brought something for someone else but they didn't know they were supposed to bring something for someone else or what have you.

So great conversation to have with your team and talk about what they want to celebrate and in what ways and making sure you're having the conversations about the work side of it, which of course happens no matter what.

Related to this, how do you handle this beyond celebrations? We talked about when there's serious things going on, when there's illnesses, when there's deaths in the family, people who have a lot of stuff going on always. In post pandemic life, there's just a lot going on. What do you do about this?

I remember in one, in one position, I was in a lot of companies though I think this is changing, have a, a version of a bereavement leave. I've seen it different ways at

different places, but it's often like two or three days or whatever.
Traditionally it delineates who qualifies for bereavement leave, which is always odd to me.

At one job I was at, my uncle had died, and I went up to his funeral on a Friday. I took that Friday off, and I went up for the funeral for the weekend. I was back at work on Monday and my boss was not in the office, but I had sent her an email, it was fairly early into my employment there, small office. And I had said, um, hey, you know, I'm still kind of new here. I remember reading something about bereavement policy. I'll take a bereavement day for Friday, I'll be back in the office Monday, I'll catch up on things then sort of thing.

I came back on Monday and when I got back on Monday waiting for me at my desk was a printed out copy of the company's- it was a company, but there were like five of us that worked there- a copy of the bereavement policy and highlighted was the list of people that qualified and my boss had written in the margins something to the effect of, please understand if I make an exception for you, I have to make an exception for everybody.

I mean, everybody was four other people, mind you.

We sat next to each other. Her office was right next to mine, so this could have been a conversation. I felt all kinds of ways about how this was handled. I continue to feel all kinds of ways about how this was handled. It brought up so many things for me. It continues to bring up so many things for me, which is a little bit like who's to say whose death is worth grieving and mourning and who is worthy of a bereavement day. It was just, it's such an odd concept to me.

To think about when things happen, if it's a death, if it's an illness, these are some policies to really think about as we as a country, as a culture and your own organizational and team cultures can continue to talk about diversity and equity and inclusion. These are concepts that are included in that.

My blanket recommendation when it comes to time off is to stop delineating things. To just have time off. You don't need to delineate bereavement and sick and vacation and just give people time off and let them figure out what they want to do with it.

If you are continuing to have a bereavement policy or bereavement time off, just let it be bereavement. There's no need for you to decide who people are allowed to bereave or grieve. We're starting to see this change in other ways. What we used to call maternity leave is now in most places being called parental leave and policies like the Family Medical Leave Act, this is including taking care of others. It doesn't have to be children. So really thinking about, and I know I'm intentionally veering a little bit off the original question because I do think it's all related here. I think it's important to be thinking about all of these concepts, which is not Pandora's box. That implies we're opening something negative and we're not.

We're opening up important questions to think about.

The solution is not let's close the box and just not talk about it at all because it's so complicated. This is a really important conversation to be having over and over again because these things are going to continue to come up.

You can't predict or think about all of them ahead of time, but as these situations pop up to be really thoughtful about how you're going to handle them. For things like parental leave, you know, situations start to come up that then get either legislated or start to get built into policies. Traditionally maternity leave, which didn't exist at one point in time, then situations came up for example, well what if I'm adopting a child? Does that count? Can I use my maternity leave if I'm adopting a child or if I'm fostering a child? Right?

All these situations that are life that are part of people's lives, how do we incorporate these?

When it comes to, if it's a celebration, if it's recognizing a difficult situation that someone has in their lives, do they all, some, none, I don't know, this is part of your conversation. Does it need to involve time, money, tangibles? I'm part of a lot of groups online and in person, but particularly, the ones online and questions constantly come up about gifts.

It's like one of the most common questions people ask, whether it's about volunteers, whether it's about staff, whether it's about bosses. It's just this constant, especially around the holidays. But no matter what, oh, it's volunteer appreciation week. What gifts should I buy? It's the holidays, what gifts should I buy for my staff? It's boss's appreciation week, what gifts should I buy? It's like such a default.

I'm not in any way saying gifts are inherently bad and I'm not telling you not to buy gifts. I am inviting you. Kind of annoying when I say that, right? But I am inviting you to consider that there's ways to celebrate without gifts too. Certainly, you are welcome to buy gifts and people like gifts and there's ways to celebrate without gifts too.

I would not dare speak for other people. I will speak for myself as a fairly frequent volunteer when I get gifts from places I volunteer at, it's fine. Some gifts are nicer than others, but it's never needed. It's sometimes cool and something I use, it's often something I then pass on to my nieces or nephews or pay it forward to somebody else. It's certainly never the reason that motivates me to volunteer. it doesn't make me feel any more appreciated than them saying to me, thanks so much for being here, or a follow-up email I get from them. Other people most likely feel differently, but I would venture to guess I'm not alone in that.

A lot of people don't need gifts to feel appreciation. If it's staff and, there are a lot of jokes that go around with staff. I think there's a lot of truth in the joking too. There's a lot of research in the joking when it comes to staff.

If you ask staff how they want to be appreciated, they do want to hear from you about how much you appreciate them and tangibly what they want from you is money and

time off. Those are the gifts they want.

Company jackets and water bottles and coffee mugs, that's cool, like if it's the extra on top. But if you have money to spend on things, most people would love that money in their pocket. I do want to also take the pressure off of you with all the gift giving because believe me, all these groups I'm in, it's like this constant, what do I buy? How do I buy it? Where do I go? How do they do shipping? Like it's so much time and energy worrying about what gifts to buy.

I'm happy to alleviate a lot of that stress and pressure to say that in most cases, don't worry about the gifts that take some of that pressure off of yourself and think about what can you do to celebrate that?

You don't need to include the gift if you have some money to include beautiful, what can you do also that maybe doesn't require money or as much money that you can still continue to celebrate?

Are there places that instead of always, you know, what's the joke from the show The Office that like everybody always has a birthday and everyone's always in the break room and it's just like a constant party all the time.

Where can you be thoughtful of like, this is when we're going to celebrate these things in person with a cake and for this other stuff, like here's some email or here's something we're going to publicly share in a meeting and that's how we're going to acknowledge it and that's it. That's how we're celebrating this thing. But if we're having a big public display with a gift and a cake for everything, that's all we'll ever do.

How we pick and choose, it's challenging.

A year or so ago I started working with a new social media consultant and she does my social media, and she helps me with some of my marketing. In the beginning she was posting for every holiday and in addition to every holiday was posting a lot about, some of the more professional focused, like, it's such and such month, it's such and such week, it's such and such day. Then every so often would do some of the sort of like, it's grilled cheese day. It's hotdog day, it's love your cat day or whatever.

I just very quickly had to be like, I think I'm going to take an all or nothing approach on this, which is the nothing, because we're going to inadvertently leave things out and my whole social media is going to end up being this which I don't want. That's not a strategy for everyone, and we're not talking about social media here. I'm sharing it as an example to say it is a lot to keep track of. So, you know, I don't know.

I don't know. Do you want to ask your staff, are there particular things we want to make sure are included in our celebrations that will also maybe change as different staff come and go?

We didn't talk a lot about holidays, but certainly you're going to have staff who celebrate different holidays. Is that something you incorporate into your team? Is that something

you don't incorporate whatsoever to avoid inadvertently leaving people out? Do you only recognize secular holidays to avoid some of that? It can get sticky. It can get really sticky.

I feel you, the person who wrote this. I feel you and I don't...

I also feel like I'm getting a little exasperated and that is not...Well, I shouldn't say that. It is. it does feel a little exasperating to me and it's not something I want to push onto all of you if it doesn't feel that way to you. But I will be honest and say it does feel a little bit exasperating to me because it can be a lot.

It's one of those things I think as a manager when it might not be something you anticipate where when you're starting this and you're thinking about, I'm a manager, I'm managing my team and my job is to support my team and make sure we're getting our work done and making sure everyone's on top of their tasks and excuse me, I'm making sure I'm supporting them and giving them what they need and coaching them and giving them training opportunities and recognizing them and I'm being such a wonderful supervisor to them and all of that is true.

And there's all this other stuff we don't know to anticipate because there's going to be staff where this stuff is really important. That recognizing when they bought a house and when they're getting married and when they are going back to school and all these things, they want it to be celebrated with the team and they want to talk about it, and they want some public something for their birthday. Like that's important for that to be woven into their work life.

If it's not, that might cause some challenges to show up at work and on the team. But for other folks, it's nothing. They don't care. They don't, want their work.

I'm still friends with someone I supervised many, many years later and in the workplace, they didn't want their birthday acknowledged whatsoever. Even now that we're friends, I do a very quick, happy birthday, hope you have a great day, that's all I'm going to do for you. That's all it is, because they just don't celebrate their birthday in that way. They were very clear, like, I don't want the cake, I don't want a song, I don't want any of that, and I respected that.

Some people don't want any of their personal life brought in. Like they don't even want people to know they're getting married, or they bought a house or like that's their private business and they don't want that being brought into the workplace.

That's where it can feel like, oh, this is part of being the manager too, is adjusting and, respecting people's preferences and making sure they feel celebrated as people and how to balance the personal and professional and that that line is different for different people in all ways, right?

Like people who disclose a lot of stuff about their personal life and people who don't want you to know anything about their personal life. And this will be true for what

people want to celebrate and what people want to be celebrated.

I had someone I supervised who was challenging for me, and they, boy did they like to be celebrated publicly loudly, frequently, and on their way out. They wanted every long, loud way to be celebrated possible. They wanted goodbye parties, and they wanted like, they just wanted so much spotlight on the way out.

For other folks, it's like, I'm good. I don't need a goodbye. I don't want people going around telling me how wonderful I am. Like I don't want to be the center of attention. Let me hand in my key and I'm out. Like, I'm good. I don't need any of that.

Did that help at all? Did that just muddy the water?

I feel like maybe we just muddied the water and then I'm leaving you with muddy water, but maybe that's where we need to leave it. Maybe today's troubleshooting session is an opportunity to get some of this stuff out that maybe you haven't had a chance to think about yet and maybe we can keep talking about it and then start to clean out that water later on. I think it is helpful because part of this work and part of the preparation that so few of us get is trying to get ahead of these things.

For me, and I know for a lot of you too, what makes this work so challenging is we don't know what's coming down the pipeline.

When that first birthday rolls around or that first death happens for someone on the team and it's like, well, so-and-so's birthday is today or so-and-so's grandma died, and you're like, oh, what do I do? What do we do? Like do I get him a cake? Do I get him a card? Do we go to the wake? Like what? I don't know, what do we do? Is there a culture built here? Is there like a policy? Is there, like how do we, and when you're forced to make the decision in the moment, we don't always make the best decision because we haven't had any time to really think about it. It's pure reaction mode.

I'm going to let it be a little muddy. Let's leave it here for a minute and think about these questions and talk to your team about it. Let it be a little muddy with them too. Look, the questions that come up here, the questions that come up in a lot of this work can't be fully solved right away.

A lot of this work is the questions and thinking about them and talking about them and talking to other people about them, including your team, including your own supervisor, and starting to work with those ideas and putting things into practice, seeing what works, trying things out, coming back, talking to other people, working through those ideas and, continuing to work through them together.

That's what we've been doing here for the past year.

Sometimes they work great and sometimes we realize, you know what,

I tried, it didn't work so great, so let's give it a try again. Each time it gets us a little bit closer to where we want to be and that my friends is growth. Slow, steady, sometimes

bumpy, but that's what it's all about.

I hope this was helpful. Hope this was valuable to you.

Feel free to share your thoughts in the forum after the fact.

I would love to keep this conversation going.

Thanks for celebrating one year- hopefully the first of many.

I'm so grateful that you're a part of this and I'm looking forward to keeping the celebration going. If you'd like to submit your own trouble, you are welcome to do so anytime.

Just reach out any way you'd like to reach out. You can email, you can put something in the forum, you can come on live or submit and we will be happy to discuss your trouble.

Thanks for being here. We'll see you next time!