

## Employee Matters: Ask an Expert

*Ask an Expert* is a monthly column published in the Employee Matters newsletter authored by experts from across the University and focused on common workplace challenges. Please find archived columns below this month's column.

**October 2024 | Author: Sarah Klaper, University Ombudsperson**

**Q: My staff is uncooperative. When I announce an initiative or give a directive, they always want to discuss it. My response is that "I am the manager. Just follow directions." I don't have time for it, nor do I feel I need to justify my decisions to them. When my boss sets an expectation, I just do it. What am I doing wrong?**

**A:** Yes, we all work differently with our managers. However, I am curious as to why you hesitate to discuss the background with your staff. Perhaps you are concerned about abdicating authority or being seen as weak if you share how decisions are made.

Meaningful transparency in decision making is an essential component of good leadership. It increases respect and belief in both a manager and the organization. Sharing the "why" behind a decision does not mean going into every detail or allowing for a vote. Instead, sharing relevant information helps your team understand the context and to accept the decision, even if they disagree.

For example, you could tell your team, "I know that we all hoped to run the full project this year. However, budget constraints are going to prevent us from doing X, Y, Z. We will have to stick with A, B, C and complete the rest of the project next year." That simple explanation acknowledges the team's interests (you saw and heard them) and provides the rationale. Ultimately, it helps them to accept the decision as being well thought out, even if they would have made a different choice.

Making time for a conversation might actually save your bacon! The team might add insight into costs or resources you didn't anticipate. They could also be mistaken and you can clear up misperceptions. Or, maybe the long-term costs are not as important because the funds simply don't exist today so you still need to go with your plan.

Sharing information and being open to discussion demonstrates that you value your team's input, builds trust, encourages effective problem solving, and team collaboration. In the end, it will help you shine as a leader.

**September 2024 | Author: Karin Schmidt, Director, HR Business Partners**

**Q: Can you help me understand my role regarding our medical/parental leave process for employees?**

**A:** Please visit our website for [Staff Medical/Parental Leave Do's & Don'ts for Managers](#).

**July 2024 | Author: Sarah Klaper, University Ombudsperson**

**Q: I am a supervisor, and staff member A just came to me about the behavior of staff member B. The behavior that A is describing is terrible. I really want to give B a piece of my mind and write them up so that they know their behavior was completely unacceptable.**

**A:** Moderating disputes between two colleagues is one of the hardest challenges facing a supervisor. I'm glad you took a beat to think it through instead of rushing to chastise B. Before you rush to judgment, have you spoken to B to hear their perspective? The person who comes to you first is not necessarily always "right" or providing all the context necessary to assess the situation.

You could first let A know you heard their concern, you appreciate they brought it to you, and you'll address the situation. Ask them if they have any thoughts on how it could best be resolved

Then, have a 1:1 meeting with B and let them know you heard about the situation with A. Ask their perspective on what happened and how things got to this point. They could provide you with context that would be important in resolving the situation. Was there a misunderstanding or miscommunication? Or was the whole thing provoked by A (from B's perspective)?

If the issue is just B's behavior, let them know it doesn't meet your expectations in this workplace. Instead, you expect that in similar situations, they will respond [describe desired behavior]. Be specific so they are clear on what you want from them. If the situation rises to a higher level of concern, it might be time to loop in your own supervisor, your local HR person, and/or your HR Business Partner for their guidance.

Finally, if the situation is really based on a misunderstanding or miscommunication, is it possible for A & B to sit down and talk it through? They could do that on their own; they could do that with you as their supervisor there to guide the conversation; or they could mediate the situation with my office or with OIDI's Mediation, Conflict Resolution, and Restorative Practices Initiative.