



EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the NJ Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter! EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance. **The EAS Employee Newsletter** contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace.*

The Keys to Great Employee-Supervisor Communication

Great employee-supervisor relationships are built through great communication, including the ability to skillfully discuss difficult or stressful topics together. This important presentation will provide several practical strategies for maintaining effective communication including building strong connections with our colleagues, superiors, etc., being more collaborative in our approach, and handling disagreement respectfully.

When:

Thursday, September 26th
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM ET

Register:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3258579030207760641>

Phone: 866-327-9133

Web: www.state.nj.us/csc

Email: EAS_help@csc.nj.gov

Keeping Conflicts Constructive

If you've ever worked with a team of people, you know that conflict is inevitable. But you may not know that conflict can be constructive.

All too often, disagreements among group members aren't resolved in a healthy manner. People may leave meetings feeling hurt, misunderstood, or alienated. Conflicts linger, creating tension, and disrupting work.

While you can't stop disagreements from happening, you can use conflicts as assets—to strengthen relationships, make sounder group decisions, and motivate members.

Using conflict constructively requires that all group members practice basic ground rules of conflict management. Without mutual practice of these principles, conflict can become destructive and downright ugly. Or just as damaging, controversial issues may be sidestepped just to keep the peace. If your team has spiraled down this abyss in the past, it may take some time and effort to correct the problem.

But these ideas will work if the group is committed to them. To make conflict constructive, each member should follow these guidelines:

- Express disagreement.
- Be sensitive.
- Criticize the idea, not the person.
- Don't be defensive.

Express disagreement.

Group members must first decide they're going to be honest with one another. This means that when they have differing views, they'll express those disagreements instead of remaining silent. (This isn't an invitation, however, to say whatever you want—that'll be discussed shortly.)

But by not speaking up when you disagree, you deprive the group of potentially valuable insight that might redirect how problems are solved or important decisions are made. You could even say that by not speaking up, you're deceiving the group because your silence may be seen as agreement.

Group leaders need to encourage open forums, where disagreement is freely expressed. If leaders seem insecure about contrary ideas being expressed, they can't expect much honesty among members.

In turn, group members are likely to come away feeling dissatisfied because their views aren't being heard. It also greatly reduces the effectiveness of decision making when all ideas aren't considered.

Be sensitive.

As you express disagreements, be aware that the words you choose can affect listeners positively or negatively.

For instance, in a class on group communication that I was teaching, a woman made this bold statement: "Men don't listen well in conversation." It may have been an honest expression of her opinion, but it certainly wasn't sensitive to the men in the group.

Instead she could have made a general statement such as, “I find it difficult when someone I’m talking to doesn’t listen well.” This captures the essence of what she wants to say, but doesn’t push emotional buttons for those in the group. And pushing emotional buttons will inevitably derail you from the topic at hand and create unnecessary tension among group members.

Considering your words carefully is more than just being politically correct. It’s extending consideration to those around you. Your disagreements have a greater chance of being heard when you phrase them sensitively.

Criticize the idea, not the person.

Express your disagreements in a way that doesn’t devalue the person with whom you disagree. This is an example of how this can be done well:

A man had just finished explaining a project proposal to a committee. A committee member who was opposed to the proposal responded, “One significant flaw in your proposal is that it excludes lower income families from participating in the program, due to cost. What can be done to include them?”

The member who raised the question may have wanted to say something like, “Who’s the bonehead who came up with this idea?” Instead, he addressed the issue and didn’t attack the person. As a result, the discussion moved forward productively.

If your goal is to use conflict to build a more cohesive group, don’t allow personal attacks or name calling to infiltrate your relationships. That will only escalate conflicts and cause people to choose sides.

If conflicts degenerate into personal attacks, you need to interrupt the conversations, make your point about such behavior being counterproductive, and ask the people to restate their disagreements by focusing on the issues. This will set a precedent for discussions. Practice this as often as needed, and group members will learn to express their disagreements openly because they’ll feel safe from verbal attacks.

Don’t be defensive.

When you’re on the receiving end of disagreements, you can feel defensive even if the people aren’t attacking you.

But often, the people disagreeing simply aren’t grasping your point. So rather than leaping to defend your positions, listen carefully to other people’s remarks. Ask them to summarize your main points. This gives you chances to pinpoint possible misunderstandings and clarify your positions.

This is a difficult skill to master. Here is an example of how to do it:

At a workshop Jane was conducting, a participant, Bob, interrupted her and accused her of being narrow. Jane’s first thought was to defend her point and move on with her material. Instead, she took a break from her presentation and asked Bob some questions.

“What is your main concern with the idea I’m presenting?” Jane asked. Bob responded with several objections, and the more he talked, the more he seemed to distort what Jane said.

So Jane asked, “What did you hear me say?” Bob paraphrased Jane’s comments in his own words—to which Jane replied, “I think you misunderstood what I was trying to say.”

Then Jane restated her point concisely, asked Bob if this made sense and moved on. In this way, Jane diffused the conflict by entering into it instead of trying to sidestep it.

By asking questions of those who disagree with you, new ideas and suggestions get thrown into conversations. These may lead to creative solutions that hadn’t been considered.

And if your idea eventually falls flat—so what? By inviting discussions, you’ve moved the processes forward in positive ways that defensive reactions could never have accomplished.

You can make conflicts work for your team, but it takes a commitment from all group members. Each person must agree to honestly state disagreements, in a sensitive manner that focuses on the ideas, not the people. Approached in this way, conflicts can be one of your greatest assets.

Source: Gilles, G. (Reviewed 2018). Keeping conflicts constructive. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

**Have you registered for the September NJ EAS Orientation webinar?
Register today!**

Employee Orientation
Wednesday, September 25th
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM ET

Register:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3290129516389472259>

Supervisor Orientation
Wednesday, September 25th
3:00 - 4:00 PM ET

Register:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2274598586743061507>

National Suicide Prevention Week

September 8-14, 2019

When a loved one or friend talks about ending their life **CONSIDER IT A CALL TO ACTION**. You can help and support them by following the 5 Action Steps below. These steps are supported by evidence in the field of suicide prevention:

Ask — It may be a tough question, but it is important to ask someone directly if they are having suicidal thoughts or contemplating ending their life. Studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.

Keep them safe — Work with the person to remove any lethal means available to them (e.g., firearms, knives, medications, etc.). Take them to an emergency room or seek help from a medical or mental health professional. Reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.

Be there — Be present, listen with compassion and without judgment, and let them know you care about them. If possible, do not leave them alone. Findings suggest acknowledging and talking about suicide may in fact reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts.

Help them stay connected — Work with them to connect to others who also care — friends, family, therapists, clergy, teachers, coaches and the like. Also connect them with the 24/7 crisis care resources. Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's number in your phone so it's there when you need it: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). Also give the person Lifeline's number and see that it is readily available to them anytime they might need it — in their cellphone, on their night stand, in the car, in a book bag, on the refrigerator or wherever it makes sense.

Follow up — Check in regularly with the person you are concerned about. For the days and weeks after the crisis, let them know you are thinking about them and that you are there to help if needed. These check-ins will go a long way to help that person feel cared about and start on the road to recovery. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at risk person.

How to Get Help for a Social Media Friend

Contact the social media site directly if you are concerned about a friend's updates, or dial 911 in an emergency. If you have found suicidal thoughts or intentions posted on Facebook, go to this website for specific directions: <http://www.save.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FB-One-Pager-for-AAS-3-1.pdf>.

Three Things to Remember

In instances where there is an imminent threat of harm to self or others, call 911.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK).

New Jersey Employee Advisory Service (EAS) is available for consultation and support 24/7.

Adapted from the following sources:

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (Revised 2017, March). 5 action steps for helping someone in emotional pain. In Suicide prevention. Retrieved April 4, 2017, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>