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SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

10 Supervisor Mistakes - and How to Avoid Them

Supervisors are often the front line for shaping employee engagement and productivity as well as overseeing compliance with workplace policies like time tracking and leave of absence requests. Mishaps in these areas can create a lot of headaches for employers. In this Tip, you will read about some of the most common supervisor mistakes and what you can do to help avoid them.

10 SUPERVISOR MISTAKES—AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Supervisors are often the front line for shaping employee engagement and productivity as well as overseeing compliance with workplace policies. However, without the proper training, direction and oversight, supervisors may be more likely to take missteps in these areas.

The following include some of the most common supervisor mistakes and what you can do to help avoid them:

1. Poor interviews. From being ill-prepared to asking inappropriate questions, there are several ways interviews can go off track and lead to an uninformed hiring decision. During an interview, supervisors should be familiar with and refer to a list of common interview questions so that valid comparisons can be made amongst candidates. Additionally, supervisors must be careful to avoid questions that have the potential to reveal a candidate's status in a protected class (e.g., the candidate's age, race, religion, etc).

Practice Tip: Train supervisors on how to prepare and conduct effective interviews. They should also be trained on nondiscrimination laws and instructed on the types of questions to avoid.

2. Ineffective goal setting. Goal setting is important for creating performance expectations and informing employees of how their achievements will be measured. Performance goals are usually set upon hire and as part of the regular performance review process. Supervisors should work with employees to set realistic goals and monitor progress to help ensure success.

Practice Tip: Consider using the SMART framework when setting performance goals. SMART goals are specific, measurable, accepted, realistic, and time-framed. This means goals should be detailed enough so that employees understand the desired outcome, who is involved, and the steps needed to achieve results. They should also be attainable, accepted by the employee, and time sensitive.

3. Insufficient feedback. Effective feedback helps employees understand the areas in which they excel or need to improve. If feedback is given infrequently (or not at all), it can leave employees unsure of where they stand and lead to decreased engagement and/or performance.

Practice Tip: Supervisors should provide frequent, timely, and constructive feedback throughout the year. When possible, feedback should be delivered in person. It is important to note that supervisors should avoid criticizing employees publicly; negative feedback should always be given privately.

4. Too little recognition. Sometimes supervisors forget the importance of recognizing and rewarding positive performance. When employees know their efforts are appreciated, it can encourage them to continue to work hard to meet company goals. Recognition can be formal or informal and does not need to involve a monetary reward.

Practice Tip: Consider public praise (e.g. in a staff meeting), a handwritten note recognizing the employee's accomplishment, or a unique work project or development opportunity. Supervisors should consider individual motivators and tailor rewards and recognition accordingly.

5. Failing to address issues promptly. Handling performance problems, conduct issues, and conflicts between employees are some of the most difficult supervisory responsibilities. Because these tasks may be considered less desirable, supervisors are sometimes slow to address them. However, ignoring the issue or delaying action can exasperate the problem.

Practice Tip: Employers should provide supervisors with training and guidelines for responding to and documenting these types of situations.

6. Mishandling leave/accommodation requests.

Supervisors need to know how to handle requests for leave as well as reasonable accommodations for a disability and religious practices or beliefs. These procedures are sometimes governed by federal or state law and may require certain notices to be provided to the employee.

Practice Tip: Supervisors must respond to these requests in a consistent and non-discriminatory manner. Employers should provide supervisors with guidelines along with the appropriate notices for responding to, documenting, and granting such requests.

7. Wage and hour violations. Supervisors play an important role in complying with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) by ensuring that their employees' time is properly accounted for. Inform supervisors of the federal, state and local rules governing wages, hours, and overtime and instruct them to comply with these requirements at all times. Supervisors should direct non-exempt employees to record all hours worked, including time worked outside of the workplace (e.g. checking email).

Practice Tip: A best practice is to have supervisors sign off on employee time cards each pay period and conduct a periodic audit to make sure company procedures are being followed.

8. Infrequent communication. Supervisors should be conveying important company information to employees on a regular basis. When employees remain informed, they are more likely to understand how their work impacts company objectives, which can in turn help to increase engagement and motivation.

Practice Tip: Guide supervisors on what information to share and how to convey it. If information is given during company-wide meetings or communications, supervisors should also be encouraged to discuss it during department and one-on-one meetings.

9. Neglecting training and development. Training can give employees the skills they need to succeed in their current job and development opportunities can provide employees with the skills they need for future growth. Both are important components of employee satisfaction and success.

Practice Tip: Supervisors should work to continually train and develop their staff. Identifying training needs and facilitating succession planning, coaching and mentoring are a few ways supervisors can help groom their employees for success.

10. Acting inconsistently or without proper oversight.

Supervisors must be consistent when enforcing company policies and procedures. While supervisors are often given some amount of autonomy, critical decisions (e.g. employee terminations) should never be made without careful consideration and proper review with the appropriate people.

Practice Tip: Employers should provide supervisors with thorough training on how to enforce company policies and procedures. They should also be provided with guidance on the types of situations that require consultation with their own manager, an HR representative, and/or legal counsel.

Effective training, guidelines, and oversight can help new as well as seasoned supervisors perform their job better and avoid common mistakes. Employers should review these areas on a regular basis to ensure intended results are achieved.

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