

Supervisor Forum September 20-21, 2022

Having Difficult Conversations with Staff

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Participants: Dutchess-3, Sunset Park-1, Steuben/Livingston-4, Broome-1, Tioga-1, Herkimer-2, Brookdale-3, Jamaica-2, Chemung-2, CAMBA-2, Bushwick-1, Albany-2, Jefferson-2, Columbia/Greene-1, Schenectady-3, Madison-2, St. Lawrence-1, Alleg/Catt-1, Ulster-1, Monroe-1, Buffalo-1, Oswego-1, Westchester-2, Ontario/Yates-1, Clinton/Franklin-1, Wayne-1

Totals: 43 participants, 26 programs

Agenda:

Large Group Discussion:

- What are the kinds of topics/situations that are requiring you to have difficult conversations?
- What have been your challenges with having difficult discussions with staff? *If a prompt is needed share that these can fall under some broad areas like:*
 - Challenges related to oneself such as discomfort with setting limits and fear of losing staff
 - Challenges related to staff such as their resistance
 - Challenges related to the agency such as feeling in the middle when you need to enforce a mandate while also supporting staff.

Break out groups: Successes

- Share some specific examples with each other, noting approaches and strategies that seemed to work well. For example, share how you started and ended the conversation
- What are some other tips and tools you have found that help with these discussions?
- What helps you stay calm?
- What supports are in place in your organization/program related to this topic? Who can you turn to for support when you face challenges in this area?
- What is the role of self-care here?

Each group shared one things that stood out from their conversations:

- Do your prep work in advance of the conversation
- Run what is going on by your PM or supervisor in advance. Talk it out with your PM to get a different perspective, to check yourself.
- Have these conversations often, revisit the topic. It's not a one-time thing.
- Set clear expectations from the start with staff; it will save you some headaches going forward.

- Use your reflective skills and strategies, how are you helping the staff person to feel supported
- Use solution-focused skills
- Be collaborative
- The phrase “help me understand” can work well.
- Avoid making assumptions about what they are thinking/feeling.
- Keep the parallel process in mind, remain curious
- Come from a place of empathy, use AND and not BUT
- Think about ways to stay calm and not take it personally, If you do get push-back, it’s about them and not you.
- It’s OK to PAUSE, to take a break, especially if you feel reactive, lost or like your own emotions are getting the better of you. You can say, let’s take a break or revisit at next supervision.
- Use other supervisors for support
- Ice cream- treat yourself and anyone else who needs it
- This is about staff’s professional growth. If you can help them understand that it’s because you care about their well-being and growth as professionals, it can help with these discussions.
- There could be some sort of underlying trauma with the staff person- just like we think about that with families, we can think about that with our staff.
- The role of self-care in this for supervisors- meditation, eating right. If you can’t help yourself, you can’t help your team.

Participants shared and also put in the chat something they heard today that they would like to put into practice (repeated statements have been combined):

- Never assume
- Remembering to use AND, not BUT! Thank you :)
- Focus on solution rather than problem
- "Help me understand..."
- Role playing with supervisor
- Ongoing conversations instead of waiting for one "big" one...
- Continuing to set aside time to check-in with my own feeling prior to holding difficult conversations.
- Make sure they feel heard, stick with the facts.
- Sometimes it gets to the point where you need to start wondering and having conversations with your PM about whether this is the right fit for an employee. Maybe they are frustrated because the job isn't what they want or expected. If it's not a fit, then working on a "transition plan" for the staff's exit from the program.
- Think about what works for YOU as an supervisee; there may be some important information there for what you can do with those you supervise.
- The people you supervise are resources, let them tell you what they need.

- Consider doing a “part II” of this topic so we can come back together and share how it went using some of these ideas.

Resources:

- From Yuleyni Ramirez, Brookdale: A training called "Blossoming Into a More Effective Supervisor" by Frank Delano was very helpful. yramirez@bhmcny.org for more information.
- From Joe Paté, Jefferson: Work Life podcast with Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist, and MCTAC CTAC trainings, <https://www.ctacny.org/trainings/jpate@ncppc.org> for more information
- From Cara Stanley, Westchester: Fierce Conversations: coordinator@fierceinc.com cstanley@jdam.org for more information
- PCANY TOL website: section on Role Boundaries in FRS, FSS and Supervisor categories could be useful. <https://www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org/Staff/training.htm>