

+ Managing in Charged Political Times

When political tensions grow, a wide range of perspectives and strong emotions can spill into the workplace. As a manager, you'll need to be aware and prepared to support and guide your team towards a respectful, professional focus. In situations such as this, you may not be sure what you should say or do. Here are some suggestions to guide you.

Communicate clearly

Address the situation directly. Acknowledge the fact that the political climate can be a source of stress. Like all stress, this can have an impact on our ability to focus.

Remind your team that we all have different life experiences and perspectives. We can't assume that everyone feels the same way or shares our beliefs about the issues or current events. The workplace should be a safe and welcoming place for all.

Communicate expectations around political topics. Healthy, constructive dialogue about current events can be valuable, but conversations that become disruptive or disrespectful are not appropriate in the workplace. You may want to consult with your HR department or review policies to be clear on company guidelines.

Talk about what unites you as a team. Reset the focus away from an "us/them" mentality. Talk about the goals you share, how you support one another, and how the success of your team is due to all of you working together.

Set the tone. Be aware that your employees may be looking to you to understand appropriate ways to interact in the workplace. Model respect and professionalism. Redirect away from charged topics.

Remind them of the bottom line. Our workplaces are made up of many different people, with many different opinions, beliefs, and perspectives. We don't have to agree with one another, but we do have to treat every person with civility and respect.

Stay aware of interpersonal dynamics

Be mindful that everyone reacts in their own way. Some people need to talk through every development, others do not. Some people want to be busy; others may need time for personal reflection. This could be a further source of friction, which may be challenging to identify. Communicate that your "door is open" and you're available to talk through any concerns.

Monitor interactions for when they become "charged," escalated, or negative. If your team is virtual, check in with employees regularly and note any changes in tone or working relationships.

Know your policies on disruptions in the workplace, including discrimination, harassment, hostile work environment, and social media policies. Be mindful that you do not discipline employees simply for having different opinions or views. Consult with HR with questions or concerns.

Consult with HR or your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if negativity increases or you're unsure of how to respond. A management consultation with an Employee Assistance Consultant (EAC) can help you talk through your concerns and formulate a response.

Additional moves

Be aware and sensitive to the fact that political anxiety can take a toll. You may see reduced concentration, employees feeling distracted or fearful, or experiencing strong emotions. Lower productivity, increased errors or increased absenteeism may be a result. Try to be compassionate and understanding of this. Work with individual employees as needed to get them on track. Recognize that the impact of this situation may continue to reverberate.

Recognize that to support your employees, you may have to put your own perspective to the side. This doesn't mean you must change your beliefs. It is just an expectation that you will prioritize your professional role.

Remind all employees of support resources available to them through their EAP. The EAP offers telephonic, face-to-face or virtual support with an EAP professional, as well as home life services.

Monitor your own emotional reaction. Supporting employees while managing your own response to challenging events can be a heavy lift. Recognize when stress is building for you. Take a break when needed. Lean on your support network to "vent" your own feelings and concerns. Try to make room for enjoyable activities or meaningful pursuits to help refocus your thoughts to a neutral place for a time

Use resources available to you as a manager

- + If you have concerns about how individual employees are reacting, or the effect on your workforce in general, call your EAP for a management consultation.
- + Your EAP offers wellness seminars that address topics like difficult emotions, anxiety, resilience, and stress management.
- + The EAP is a source of support for both managerial and personal concerns. Along with the professional help above, the EAP can connect you with resources for personal support and is completely confidential.