

Employees have gripes? Hold a peaceful meeting

Talking to a group of employees about their complaints can be uncomfortable, but it's part of being a good manager.

Allowing grievances to go unaddressed can hurt employee morale and productivity.

Managers who take time to listen to the complaints will get to know their employees better and build mutual respect and trust.

Here are guidelines to planning and conducting group meetings for employees to express their concerns openly without fear of repercussions.

Don't create a detailed agenda. Distribute a notice for the meeting that includes the time and place, along with the topic.

Be positive. Open the meeting with a short statement. Don't say, "The purpose of this meeting is to discover why there are so many problems." Instead, say something like, "The purpose of this meeting is to hear issues that people may have and explore ways to address them if possible."

Listen more than talk. Remain calm and attentive if some employees become animated. Don't become defensive and try to address every complaint on the spot.

Don't let the biggest complainers dominate. Patiently listen to those who talk the most, but determine whether quiet employees feel the same way by asking them what they think. Encourage hesitant speakers to talk with encouraging phrases like, "Go ahead, I'm listening," or "Tell me more about that."

Seek suggestions for solutions. Ask, "What ideas do you have for addressing that issue?"

Fix what you can then and there. If there is an easy solution to some or all of a problem then go ahead and make the change.

Don't allow personal attacks. Limit the meeting to company policies and work-related issues. Ask that employees discuss interpersonal problems with management one-on-one.

Insist on a civil tone. Make it clear that although employees may feel passionate, they cannot raise their voices in anger or to drown out someone else's opinion.

End the meeting correctly. Say you will look into ways to address the issues and will schedule another meeting soon to follow up.