

What to do when an employee is too friendly

Overly friendly staff members can pose a real dilemma for managers. How can you keep a professional distance and avoid the appearance of favoritism, yet still make sure that you don't alienate the employee? Here are some tips that can help:

Be direct. Many managers are simply too polite. They nod and smile while the staffer continues to shoot the breeze. Instead, let him or her know if you can't talk right now. Check your watch and say, "You need to work, and so do I." A direct appeal, delivered in a pleasant, nonthreatening tone, can put a cap on too much chatter.

Politely ignore them. One manager who was interrupted constantly by an overfriendly staffer found this solution: "Instead of instantly acknowledging this staffer when he strolls by or stands next to me, I keep doing whatever it is I'm doing," the manager says. **The result:** "He's getting the message that he can't chat with me any time he wants."

Use your presence as a reward. Assign tasks to these workers via e-mail or memos. Once the work is satisfactorily completed, visit in person to thank them and to praise them for their efforts.

Harness their friendliness. Assign them jobs that require good interpersonal skills.