

Keep employees in check through assertive management techniques

Assertiveness is a key component to being an effective manager, and is particularly important when dealing with difficult employees who thrive on testing your boundaries.

In an HR training webinar titled *How To Manage Problem Employees & Difficult Supervisory Situations*, author and management expert Glenn Shepard, president of Glenn Shepard Seminars, lamented the fact that in many workplaces, managers who lack assertiveness have allowed their employees to spiral out of control, letting the tail wag the dog, so to speak.

Why do employees behave badly to begin with? "Because someone who is in authority is allowing them to behave that way."

Shepard observed that weak managers actually attract and/or create problem employees. "In order for you to be an effective manager, your employees do not have to respect you personally, but they do have to respect the authority of the position you hold."

Overall, said Shepard, "the three words that have to describe you as a manager, if you're going to be effective in managing today's workforce: firm, fair, and consistent."

Here are some techniques you can use to become a more assertive — and, therefore, more effective — manager:

Set and communicate clear boundaries and expectations. Managers who fail to clearly define and consistently enforce boundaries are just asking for trouble from their employees. "Your employees are not mind readers," Shepard emphasized. "You have got to clearly, clearly, clearly define what you expect and what you will not tolerate." The good news, he pointed out, is that "the firmer you are and the more people realize you don't budge, the less they will test the boundaries."

Hold everyone accountable, even when you don't want to. "You have an obligation to your company to do the right thing; they are paying you to make the tough decisions," stated Shepard. You also "owe it to your good employees not to let problem employees get away with things they shouldn't." Although this can be particularly hard when you're dealing with someone you like or with whom you empathize, said Shepard, "you are a manager, not Dr. Phil. Don't get involved in personal lives."

Don't stomp on your employees' rights or be disrespectful. "You don't have to be a jerk to be assertive," he noted. A dysfunctional, authoritarian manager will be able to get employees to comply, but not to commit. "You want people to commit, because that's how you get your employees to give more than you ask for."

Choose your battles carefully. "A smart manager knows that it's better to lose the battle, sometimes, in order to win the war," Shepard observed. Choosing not to fight a battle you know you can't win is a sign of wisdom, not weakness.