

Are you a belittling boss?

Many otherwise skilled managers fall into a trap without realizing it: They subtly belittle their employees.

You're thinking, "I would never do that!" Don't be so sure. Here are some common ways that supervisors unintentionally hurt the feelings of their subordinates:

Downplaying exceptional effort. You're a results-driven manager. You evaluate people based on productivity benchmarks, sales volume and other hard numbers.

That's fine, but don't discount Herculean effort that's hard to measure. If workers put in long hours to fill a customer's order, acknowledge their effort even if the customer winds up canceling the order.

Playing "topper." When employees share their success stories, let them bask in glory. Don't jump in to regale them with detailed accounts of your past exploits.

As much as you enjoy reminiscing about your career high points, consider the message you send by trouncing on their story: My life is more important than yours. And whatever you've accomplished, I can top that.

Negating valid points. You know not to belittle employees' ideas. But do you manage not to shut down people who make perfectly valid statements or observations?

This tends to happen when bosses dwell on one part of a broad issue. Your laser-like focus precludes you from listening to a staffer's sound input about another aspect of the same issue. The employee thinks, "I'm making an important point and my boss doesn't care."