

Employee undermining a manager? Tips to fix it

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An employee undermining a manager is the worst feeling a boss can get. No one takes you seriously. You have employees who think they are the boss - they're running the show and getting away with, well, whatever they want. Your authority is nonexistent or severely compromised.

What's next? You either fix it or you won't be a boss much longer. Here are several tactics you can try to turn stop an employee undermining a manager.

Tell, don't ask

Most of your directives should be commands, not questions. *"Please have this back to me by noon tomorrow,"* is more authoritative than *"Does noonish tomorrow work for you?"* The former is respectful, but forceful. The latter turns you into a doormat.

Play on two teams

Let your staff know that you're not only the leader of their team, but you're also a player on the larger team. You need to defend the policies and procedures of the organization. Failure to do so will show employees that you're operating on your own, and upper management doesn't have your back. This gives employees the green light to do an end run around you, effectively draining what little authority you thought you had.

Build a "firm phrase" arsenal

For the most part, your words should be considerate toward your staff. But from time to time you'll need to show some bite, so you'll need a few lines that have teeth. Examples: *"Let me be clear about this."* *"We don't tolerate that here."* Or just add the word *"now,"* as in *"I need to see you in my office. Now."* Overuse of your tough talk will turn staff against you, so use it judiciously.

When needed, be unpleasant

Your workers expect you to correct the flaws, inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the workplace. That means confronting slackers, saboteurs and rule-breakers. If your nature is perpetual joviality, shake it when you go into corrective mode. You need to reprimand, discipline, set an employee straight. Channel your inner bulldog. Employees do need to be reminded that there are consequences for crossing your clearly drawn lines.

Be friendly, but not friends

It's all about compassion and camaraderie, not forging friendships. Once you've established yourself as a "buddy" to your subordinates, they will see you as a peer. The manipulators will manipulate, take advantage of

the situation and irreparably undermine your authority. Show interest in their personal lives, but don't wander into it.

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Is it time to formally discipline?

If you have an employee who is breaking all the rules or undermining you in front of the team, you may have to take further action and escalate it to a [formal, documented discipline process](#).

Consider these factors to deem whether it's time to start a formal discipline write-up.

Examine the past record

Are there any other instances of insubordination or questionable behavior from the employee? Has the employee been disciplined in the past? How and for what? How are her performance appraisals?

Get the facts

Did the employee recognize that she was breaking a rule? Is there a possibility that the rule wasn't broken? Might she really have been sick? Did you call to find out how she was and receive no answer? Don't try to make a disciplinary decision until you know all the circumstances.

How have you dealt with other employees who have broken the same rule?

The discipline must be consistent with both your policy and past practice. You have the right to be less severe with a veteran employee with a good record than a newcomer with a series of bad reports, as long as your policy gives you flexibility.

Is the policy creating the problem?

Could you consider some sort of accommodation that would allow options, such as employees covering for each other during busy periods? An insubordinate act by a good employee might be an indication that a change is in order. If the insubordinate act is committed by a continually troublesome individual, keep these rules of thumb in mind.

What NOT to do

- Don't make value judgments. Stick to the job description at hand, not what you think of the employee personally.
- Don't continually harangue the employee on a certain point. Make your point once and go on.
- Don't make idle or thinly veiled threats. Making threats only serves to make the confrontation less productive and strains relations even more.

Moving forward

Whichever route you take, [document all the details](#). If you find later on that you need to terminate the employee or want to begin a performance improvement plan or take other disciplinary measures, it's important to have all the details clearly documented in case the employee takes legal action.