

## What to Do | Supervising in a Union Environment

*Most communications between supervisors and staff remain the same as before unionization. Three topics that are impacted are conversations about the union, about bargaining, and conversations that could lead to disciplinary action.*

### What stays the same

*Before and after the union contract is signed, effective supervisors continue to delegate work, check in on progress, manage performance, and foster accountability. This includes using an equity lens in application of all management functions, including:*

- ▶ Assigning work, setting expectations & communicating priorities
- ▶ Changing assignments, reporting, and debriefing
- ▶ Giving direction, guidance, and feedback on performance
- ▶ Being equitable, fair, and consistent in how you apply policies
- ▶ Developing and coaching people to improve performance
- ▶ Addressing team dynamics and conflicts

### When to check with your supervisor

*Managers are agents of the organization under the NLRA. This means your organization is held accountable for what you do and say.*

- ▶ Serious concerns about performance should be brought to the attention of your supervisor and/or HR before you address them as they may involve the union.

If a union member says they want to have a union representative in a meeting, it's a good idea to pause and get support from your supervisor or HR. You may have to clarify that the conversation is not a disciplinary or investigative meeting. If the meeting *is* investigatory or disciplinary, the staff member may have the right to have union representation. However, the union should not be involved in routine supervisory conversations that are not about potential discipline or termination.

- ▶ If a union member says they will or won't do something because of the union, or want time off for union business, check with your supervisor or Human Resources before responding.

- ▶ If your unionized staff want to talk about the union in team spaces, set a boundary and let them know it's ok for employees to talk among themselves about the union, but not when management is present.

## **When to redirect union staff to the union**

*It is therefore important for supervisors **not** to enter into conversations about the union or any issue related to bargaining. This includes not engaging in the following:*

- ▶ Conversations in your presence that disparage or question the union, including complaints about activities or actions of the union.
- ▶ Conversations that seek to elicit or influence your opinion regarding pay, benefits, or other subjects of bargaining.
- ▶ Conversations where an individual employee or group of employees is seeking to negotiate directly with you for a promotion or salary increase.

## **Setting boundaries**

*It's important to name and set boundaries with union-represented employees, clarifying that as management you are not part of the union and will not discuss, influence, or participate in union-related conversations.*

You do not have to do this in an anti-union way. The union has the right to self-determination, and management is not allowed to influence, dominate, or interfere with the union. Holding clear boundaries is a way to respect the union and its autonomy. Even if you mean to advise union members in a pro-worker manner, you may be sending mixed signals or even violating the law if you engage in conversations about union matters or collective bargaining.

*Example: "I'm glad we have a staff union, and I believe in collective bargaining. I also want to set a clear boundary that, as management staff, I will not influence you or get involved. It sounds like you have important questions. These are good questions to bring to your colleagues in the union or the union representative."*

## **Conclusion**

Supervising in a union environment calls on you to step into your role with confidence and clarity. Be sure to ask for more training and support if you need it.