Confronting Problem Employees:
Deal Directly

Fight the urge to avoid employees who are difficult to deal with, annoying, marginally productive, or who possess unpleasant attributes. Supervisor-employee alienation is a prime factor in a deteriorating relationship that reduces greatly a supervisor’s willingness to address issues. Know what each staff member is working on. Keep up with progress. Listen to their concerns. Give yourself a monthly grade about how well you are doing.

Cultivate an attitude of objectivity in dealing with employee behavior. Once an employee problem is identified, it is theirs to solve. Paternalism, favoritism, and condescension are poor ways to develop employees. You owe employees the opportunity:

- to hear what management believes is unacceptable behavior directly
- to receive guidance on the way the organization wants the individual to behave
- to demonstrate acceptable behavior
- to decide for themselves how to proceed and to face the consequences of that decision

One of the biggest mistakes supervisors make is to personalize an issue and become upset, angry, or disappointed with a person. Although it’s human to feel that way sometimes, it’s important to remember that dignity requires that we honor a person’s choices. Help when appropriate to do so but don’t take responsibility for a subordinate’s misconduct. If you are not as objective as you think you should be, use a journal to record what you believe you are doing, how you feel about it, what you need to change, and how you will measure your success at making changes.

If you are preparing to confront an employee, be sure you are in a positive frame of mind. What does that mean for you?