

AMS Training Institute  
Supervisory Training Webinar Series  
Presents

Solving Problems with Employees  
[TRANSCRIPT]

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the AMS Training Institute Supervisor's Webinar Series. Today's broadcast will be **Solving Problems with Employees** with Miss Loretta Gladden and Dr. Linda Joseph. During the presentation, all participants will be in listen only mode. If you would like to ask a question during the presentation, please use the chat feature located in the lower left corner of your screen. If you need to reach an operator at anytime, please press star zero. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded today December 14, 2010. I would now like to turn the conference over to Ms. Loretta Gladden. Please go ahead ma'am.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Thank you. Hello and thank you for joining us in the second of series of the AMS training institute's webinars for supervisors. I am Loretta Gladden, the program manager for the AMS supervisory training program and I will be your moderator for today's session, Solving Problems with Employees addressed by our guest speaker Dr. Linda Joseph. Before this webinar gets underway, I want to share a few things with you in the way of expectations for this session. One, just as before in the previous webinar, this webinar will last for one hour and as has already been mentioned, you will have an opportunity to ask questions in the form of written chat questions through the chat feature. Any questions remaining in the queue at the conclusion of the webinar will be addressed by the appropriate person and responses will be posted on the AMSTI webpage through our mailbox. This

will include any additional questions that you might submit. With that in mind, you would be able to visit the AMSTI mailbox at [AMSTI@USDA.GOV](mailto:AMSTI@USDA.GOV) for any responses to your questions. Now, you can be assured that the questions you chat to us for response during this webinar or any of those you might submit at the conclusion of this webinar can only be seen by us. Therefore, your identity is protected and you will remain anonymous. We are aware that some of you will be participating today in a group format versus an individual format. If that is the case in your situation, please send us a message to the AMSTI email box again at [AMSTI@USDA.GOV](mailto:AMSTI@USDA.GOV) and let us know how many people participated in your group from that particular location. This webinar is designed to be interactive so your participation is encouraged to help make this learning experience a success. Now with that in mind, a polling feature has been included for use to respond to questions that will be posed periodically. Those of you in a group setting can have one person enter a response that you all decide upon in your group and again, your responses will only be visible to us. This session too, as was the other one, will be archived and accessible twenty four hours a day, seven days a week for a year and should be available for you to access on the AMSTI homepage through AGNES within a few days. Now as we move on I would like to share some information with you about our speaker Dr. Linda Joseph.

Dr. Joseph is a specialist in conflict and anger management working with a number of government and private agencies. She is also a licensed practicing psychologist who has worked with AMS in various capacities for over 20 years. Dr. Joseph has delivered training content for numerous basic and advanced AMS supervisor training programs and has served as the first AMS alternative resolution program manager. She remains a valuable resource to the organization's alternative resolution service. Dr. Joseph also continues to provide countless individual consultations with many of our AMS programs on an array of topics. Through

today's topic Solving Problems with Employees, we intend to address the following as indicated on the outline slide;

1. To identify common supervisory concerns.
2. To categorize levels of dysfunction among employees.
3. Develop strategies for resolving issues
4. Prevent and manage workplace anger

So now let's welcome Dr. Linda Joseph. Linda?

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### **LINDA JOSEPH**

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Thank you Loretta and I'd like to say hello to all of you in AMS. It's a great pleasure to be back among you again. I have the greatest respect for your organization. You, as supervisors face a wide variety of challenges and have survived them all. You execute a very important public mission and you are often caught in the cross-fires of circumstances that you didn't create. Some of these are issues with employees. Hopefully today's webinar will help with this set of challenges. Issues with either one or more employees can have such a devastating effect on the success of your entire workgroup that they can cause it to become dysfunctional. As a result I've thought about today's topic as coping with employee dysfunction or ED. Now if only there were a little blue pill we could take. A quick look at the next slide will show that employee dysfunction has measureable cost to the organization. There is a decline in work output; both the quality and quantity suffer. And as supervisors I don't really need to explain that to you. There is damage to customer relationships, low morale. A dysfunctional group culture can develop in which people are unproductive and demoralized and disinterested in their work. You can have increase in grievances and civil rights complaints. Dysfunctional employees will require sometimes to be worked around. You might have to find other people to do the job that they are not doing. You

might have to approach them so delicately that you tend to avoid talking to them. So that is what we call a work around. And most importantly of all, the major consequence is the health, time and quality of life for co-workers and supervisors. So we really want to take this very seriously and realize that it can be measured.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Linda, are there different degrees of dysfunction?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well that is an important point. We tend to treat all problem employees as though they are the same, but actually there are three different levels of employee dysfunction and it's worth categorizing because you approach them very differently. The majority of problem employees are what we call opportunistic. This would be about seventy percent of the problem employees. And these are people who basically are well intentioned and good people, but they have got a problem and the problem has caused them to be less productive or create other problems. The important thing is that they have an underlying concern that you should address. The second group of people is what you might call deterministic. These are people who are determined to create a problem. They have some sort of emotional satisfaction that they get from the trouble they are causing. Maybe they like feeling in control or they like seeing other people feel helpless or they like being in a conflict situation. These are people that ultimately you will have to engage the disciplinary process through employee relations. The third category of people are people that are so self-destructive that...

<Undetectable noise>

I'm sorry?

The third category of people are so self destructive that there's not going to be too much you can do about them. You will either have to remove them, isolate them or find some way to work around them.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Does this mean then that some of those people might have some mental health issues?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Yes, that is... this covers the full spectrum of human issues. The people in the third category are people that may commit suicide, they may become end stage alcoholics or substance abusers, they may have nervous breakdowns. So, we are talking about the full range of human type issues you might come across.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Where then, would you say that you would start working with an employee in dealing with those problems?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well, the most unfortunate thing that I see happening based on my experience in AMS is supervisors jumping too quickly towards employee relations. That is the tendency to just muddle along and get real frustrated and then finally bring in the disciplinary process. The first thing that a supervisor should do to prevent more complications is to assume that there is a solvable problem. Because the odds are that your difficult employee has an issue that if you resolve it, things will improve. Second, what you want to do is identify clearly what behavior you want, instead of the behavior you have. So, if you have an employee, let's say is not turning their work in on time or not showing up at the grading site on time. I mean, there is a tendency to focus in on what that behavior is rather than what you want them to be doing. So, you have got to get yourself into a problem solving frame of mind. This enables you to partner with the employee in making things better. Because ultimately, having a good working relationship is in the interest of the employee as

much as it is for you. And then you would resort to discipline and working around the problem only when problem solving failed.

What's going to happen is that you'll see certain symptoms, conflicts, unmanageable employees, careless work performance, mistakes, timeliness. Maybe the people are not responsive to the customers, maybe they are just not there, they're late, abusing leave, and they might be negative with poor attitudes, critical, complaining, low morale. So you can see certain behaviors and that is what the supervisor is reacting to. Now what we would find that the employee is experiencing is something a little bit different. The employee is probably experiencing feelings of being upset or stressed, frustrated, annoyed, irritated, impatient, resentful, anxious. So these are what the employee might be experiencing.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Now Linda, this sounds like that you are identifying some forms of anger.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well, that's a good way of summing it up, because it is low level - it's still anger. A lot of times people think of anger as somebody being enraged and throwing things, but all of these are symptoms of anger in its early stages.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Well, what kinds of things then would cause the anger?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well, almost anything can cause anger. Almost anything can create it, but if you resolve it down into the underlying causes, you find that there are four basic causes;

The first is loss of control

The second is perceived disrespect

The third threats to territory or safety'

And the fourth is rejection

A superficial situation may appear one way to you but it could be interpreted entirely different by your employee. For example, leaving someone out of the meeting - to you, it may just be a matter of practicality, but to the employee it may be a sign of disrespect or it may make them feel that they are failing in some way, that there is a reason why you left them. So, it's always a matter of perceptions, but these are very deep issues. When you tap into these things, these are the reasons people kill, commit suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol. So these are the fundamental aspects of how people operate. If you think about why that might be, it's because whenever these forces are tapped into in the personality it taps into the persons sense of safety and survival and it initiates something called a survival reaction. We have, born within us, a survival mechanism. This is part of our biological heritage. The way it works is when you perceive a threat or stress or something that you consider dangerous, your adrenaline response is activated. This is not something you do voluntarily. This is something that just happens. You're hardwired to do this. When adrenaline is activated, your instinctive survival response is activated. Now unfortunately, people today are not usually dealing with physical threats to their safety but we do react to psychological threats the same way as we would react to a physical threat. So whether you see a bear coming at you at your camp site or your boss insulting you or your employee seeming insubordinate, you're going react physically in the same way. The same pattern of events will unfold.

One of the other unfortunate aspects of all of this is that in order to survive your body tends to shut down your logical and rational reasoning and activate our instinctive pattern of behavior

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Okay, now we come to our first polling question. Our first polling question says: Ralph calls Jane an airhead in a meeting with others. Jane's fuming resentment is likely triggered by:

1. Perceived disrespect
2. Threat to her safety and security
3. Feelings of rejection

Would you please make your selections now?

Repeats selections.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Now to some extent, you could make an argument for any of the three. For example, if Jane felt that he was her friend formerly and now he was attacking her, she might feel rejected? If she was worried that she was on the short list for being terminated for a reduction in force it might be a threat to her safety or security but the most likely cause is perceived disrespect. That if you are sitting in a meeting and someone makes an insulting comment about you; it can make you very upset very quickly because you feel disrespected. Now what's happening is that the minute you perceive a stress, you activate an adrenaline response. This adrenaline response is initially experienced as a rush of emotional distress and then physically it resolves into anger or fear or someplace in between. And what's happening here is more than 1400 chemical and hormonal changes are cascading throughout your body the minute adrenaline is triggered. What adrenaline is doing is it's turning you into a physical survivor and for purposes of discussion, I call this a physical combat mode. It is going to enable your reflex and movement centers to get the most priority in terms of your basic neurology. Your muscles will be tense and full of blood. Your pain threshold will go up and your heart rate, blood pressure,

breathing and blood sugar levels will all go up, because you're going to need all that energy. In turn, things that are not considered essential for physical activity are shut off. That would include digestion, sex hormones, immune responses and most importantly reasoning. So you're finding that the person is getting ready to go into the boxing ring, so to speak and reasoning is not going to be helpful. So it is just put off to the side. So we have a very pronounced physical change that occurs within us when we get upset and these changes occur whether the anger is small or light, whether you're enraged or frustrated - just to varying degrees.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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So then it would be important for supervisors to be able to recognize anger in others and they would be able to do that perhaps by the change in the person's complexion, their breathing pattern, their postural changes, clenching of fists or jaw, tone of voice, the quality of their eye contact, their body language and then their speech pattern. Would that be right?

< Talking over each other >

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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That's right, there used to be an acronym that went with GROWL. But the idea is that you should be, in any sensitive discussion, watching the emotional or physical reaction of the person with whom you are speaking and you'll begin to see these changes occur. The minute you see them occur, you know that there is an emotional change going on within that person that may or may not become very significant.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Okay, we now come to our second polling question, which is:

During a discussion about his work, the supervisor notices his employee becoming tense, avoiding eye contact and clenching his jaw. The employee is likely feeling;

1. Exhilaration
2. Sadness
3. Irritation

Please make your selection now.

<Repeats selections>

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## **LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well almost everybody got that right. You know exhilaration - you recognize the person is lighting up, there is lightness to them, and they might be smiling. While with sadness there is a general suppression of emotional responsiveness and irritation is pretty distinctive. Although we do keep in mind that everyone shows their emotions differently. Some people raise their voice and become animated and some people become very controlled and quiet. So knowing your people enables you to read them a little bit better.

So were going to sum this up by saying that adrenaline has a perceptible effect on people. It has a drug like effect on the body and also on the mind. It's the power behind aggressive behavior. It's compulsive. So, you think about the last time you were really angry, you felt like you had to do something. And this is an essential part of understanding anger, how it makes people feel compelled to act.

A second important thing is that it escalates very easily. We don't know why that is, but a little bit of anger can quickly become a lot of anger. Another thing we don't know or understand is why it's so contagious. But you can have one angry employee in a workgroup and before you know it, its spread like wildfire and everyone is furious. All we have to do is look at the TV at the riots they are

showing in England and the people in a state of intense rage and how quickly it spread through the crowd, this kind of violence. Anger in some is a form of intoxication and that is because of adrenaline. It has profound effects on the reasoning centers of the brain and it limits or prevents rational thought.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Okay, polling question number three;

While giving a work assignment the supervisor recognizes the signs of anger in the employee's body language. At this point, what should she do?

1. Ignore it
2. Tell him to grow up
3. Give the employee the opportunity to express his concern

<Repeats choices>

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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I think in this case everyone chose number three. I think we understand that when an employee is getting upset if we ignore that there's gonna be repercussions. The employee is going to react, maybe not in our presence but outside of our presence. They may do less than a stellar job at their work. They may say critical and negative things to others. They may take a day off. Telling an employee to grow up or be more realistic or that they don't have a right to get upset runs the risk of alienating the employee and making them feel marginalized. So usually it is important to give the person a chance to express what their concerns are.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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With that in mind, Linda, is there anything in particular that a supervisor should or should not do or say to the employee, once they provide the employee with the opportunity to express their concerns?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well, I would say it's upsetting when someone else has an issue and they start getting upset and talking about it - it's hard to know what the right thing to do is. But the right frame of mind you should kind of put yourself in is just to listen and understand and try to clarify the persons concerns. You've given an employee a performance rating and the employee is obviously not happy with it. You might say to them "I can see have some concerns, what are they?" And then just listen, be prepared to understand.

<Talking over one another>

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Go ahead, I'm sorry.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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I was going to say, the tendency might be to get defensive; tell them that their wrong and you're right uh, to ignore it or overlook it. Those would be sort of natural tendencies.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Okay, so then if we were to sum up this particular section on understanding anger I guess it would be important for us to remember that adrenaline surges release survival instincts evidenced by physical changes, mental changes, aggressive actions and various other forms of expression

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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That is correct; the most important thing for us as supervisors is to consider how anger affects the mind because it does have a very pronounced effect on people's reasoning.

Now if you look at this picture, what you see are a group of guys who are very very focused on a threat. And this is illustrating the kind of effect, what way adrenaline affects mental processes. These guys are probably not thinking about stray thoughts like what they are going to have for dinner or whether their nose itches. They are highly focused on what the threat is that is out there. And they are going to be able to quickly respond, to shoot first and ask questions later. If we look at the next slide. What we're going to see here is two drawings of the brain. The one on the left is the normal brain and the one on the right is the brain after it's been hit with adrenaline. What adrenaline does is bring about a series of changes that suppresses reasoning and emotional regulation.

Now I'll give you an example. I'll ask you for an example from your own life, a time when you were very very angry. It's almost like a force that carries you along and hopefully this doesn't happen to us too often, but once we get caught up in this process it has its own momentum. And so when a supervisor is dealing with an upset employee you should recognize that they aren't in full control of their reasoning process. So the supervisor might be in the reasoning on the left but the employee would be function would be functioning with the one on the right.

Now neuroanatomists call this the reptilian brain, the one the right and uh, because this is the sensory control center and the reflex centers and the parts of your brain that regulate things like heart rate and blood pressure and breathing. So, sometimes we call that lizard brain. Some often say that when driven by passion the human mind functions as the same instinctual level as a reptile. And your strength as a supervisor is to let that happen. To know that it may be happening in the angry person that you are dealing with but, your conscious control can prevent it from happening to you.

It creates something we call a psychological combat mode. These are the hallmark characteristics of it;

Intense focus on the threat

No empathy for the adversary- the angry person is not thinking about the issue that somebody else has, they are thinking about their own issues and nine times out of ten, they feel like a victim. So they may be looking like a monster to the people around them but they are feeling like a victim. This gives them the ability to justify their own actions. There is also an urgency to act. People who are upset have a compulsion to act. You can think about the last time you felt like going in and telling your boss to just shove his job and that is not something you act on - but that urge is there to just do something. And the tendency to minimize or disregard the consequences.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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So a supervisor might expect an angry employee to ruminate and relive the offence they might feel compelled to retaliate or act impulsively. They might misread situations and people, disregard important information or perhaps feel like they are the victim and exhibit distorted thinking.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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That's right; they're just under the influence of adrenaline which is a form of intoxication. And their characteristic thinking patterns that we can identify. There is a black and white type of reasoning - that all or nothing, there's no shades of grey in their thinking. There is a tendency to jump to conclusions. Two people go in the office and shut the door and the upset employee might jump to the conclusion they are talking about him. There is a tendency to take things personally whether it is meant that way or not. Blaming others, labeling and name calling and possibly one of the most significant - the tendency to agitate, to push other peoples buttons so they get upset.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Okay, so the things then for the supervisor to know or remember when they are talking to angry people is that they need to recognize that anger is form of intoxication and that they need to resist their own tendency to react remembering that anger is contagious, as you mentioned. That it spreads and escalates very easily, it seeks, uh that they seek to provoke a reaction in others, meaning the other person and then managing the dialogue with the angry person would be extremely important. And that would be an opportunity for them to apply their listening, diffusing and problem solving skills.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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That's right. So we want to keep in mind that intervening early is a good thing. If you save the employee a little distress that's a little problem and they can talk about it. If you wait until things get out of control then it is much harder to deal with. And it is contagious and you have a tendency to react, that you need to resist and that's your edge - being able to stay in conscious control. We have our own instinctive reactions to anger. So one, if somebody's upset around you, you're natural response will be to counterattack or to back down. Now when we say counterattack it means we get in the other persons face and say whatever power thing we need to say and backing down is when we start apologizing or becoming passive, and backing away from the situation. Both of these natural reactions are going to tend to make the problem worse. So you want to recognize that you have this natural tendency to react, it's not necessarily the right thing to do. And you want to just step back and stay in conscious control of your feelings.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Okay, well Linda if, that is the case, then how should you talk to an angry person?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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The first thing to keep in mind is that disagreeing with someone who is upset is the wrong strategy. On one hand, it may be just be a waste of your time because they're not predisposed to listen. The second is that you might become the target of the anger, that they might turn it on you. A third thing is that you might actually lose their trust; they might feel that they can't trust you. You may wind up provoking the very behavior you're trying to prevent. On the other hand, listening has its own pitfalls. As you allow people to vent, you need to watch whether or not listening is having a good or bad effect. Because sometimes people get more and more upset the more they talk about whatever is on their mind. So, secondly, when they start talking about what's on their mind it may upset you and your own instinctive reactions can be triggered. So your conscious edge is to keep in mind that only one goal can be accomplished when somebody's is upset. And that is to help the person to regain their composure and to think reasonably. And to do this, you want to try to lead away from feelings. You don't tell them not to feel what they obviously feel, because that's kind of insulting. What you want to do is ask those questions about facts. Not their interpretations, not their opinions, but questions like "What happened?" "What did you do?" "When did this occur?" "Where was it?" but nice solid facts. And as you ask these open ended questions and the person is drawn back from their reaction and talking about the facts there's a tendency for rationality to return.

The second important thing is to realize that when you are dealing with an upset person. You do have a problem; you don't necessarily have a solvable problem. If you have given an employee an unsatisfactory performance rating and their upset, and their obviously upset about it, you want to lead towards some kind of statement of what they can do to make things better. And that is what the skills sets all about. What would you like to have happen? What kind of result do want? What would make things better? You're trying to bring about a focus on the future.

Anger is by nature, a retrospective emotion. When people are angry they are focused on the past and it kind of locks them in to a past focus. They just ruminate and relive what happened to them over and over, getting angrier and angrier each time they think about it. And the goal is to help them redirect their attention. So that they are thinking okay okay this happened, now what am I going to do about it? What would make it better?

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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So Linda when you talked about, just to interrupt you for a moment, when you talked about that problem statement, that here again the example that you cited about a performance appraisal is that a situation where you would use a problem statement?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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That's yeah, that's a good point. If a person's upset and you're asking them what's on their minds and they'll say "Well you gave me a really unfair performance appraisal or you shouldn't have rated me this way". Uh, you can ask "well, what do you think you should have been rated or how you should have been rated?" Begin the dialogue about it. The goal is to come up with some statement of what they want as an outcome. Do they want, is there something you can do to help them get additional experiences to improve their performance rating in the future. Is there some evidence they can bring forth to show you that your rating wasn't entirely accurate. Is there some documentation they have that you might not be aware of? So a problem statement is the first goal in problem solving. It's to take all of that emotional mess that you've got on your hands and turn it into a statement of one or more problems that could be solved. And you kind of get there by summarizing and restating their concerns. Sometimes this may take a little bit of time for you to get a good beat on what exactly is their problem. This isn't always

terrifically obvious. So the employee is upset and they're venting. And you say "If I understand correctly you feel that I overlooked documentation about your expense reports and um, secondly you can seek their help in understanding because you are trying to partner with the employee in problem solving. You want to keep in mind the natural tendency with problem employees is an adversarial relationship that gets worse and worse and worse until employee relations is called in. And then some disciplinary measure is imposed. And that is what you're trying to prevent. You're trying to stay on the same side of the fence with the employee and say "You've got a problem and I want to help you solve it or we have a problem, together we're going to solve it". You can ask about, sometimes when talking to them you can ask about factual evidence and alternative interpretations they may not have considered. For example, this often happens one employee might feel that other employees leave them out or exclude them from their clique. You might say, "What evidence is there? How often has this happened? Is there any other reason they might have gotten together without you?" You can use "what if" questions to develop options for the next step or future focus. A "what if" question would be "What if we moved your office?" "What if we changed your working hours?" You're just trying to help the employee think of options that will enable them to resolve their concerns.

So the goal here is to recognize that blame and emotional pain tend to block the normal problem solving process. Your goal as the supervisor is to kind of diffuse that through listening and understanding and focusing on the facts and helping the person move into problem solving.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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So basically then, what we want the supervisor to do is to identify the employee concerns, Avoid taking offense, define the solvable problems, maintain future-

focus goal-oriented problem solving approach and partner with the employee for managing and expressing their feelings. Is that correct?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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That is correct. The only one there that might need elaboration is when we say partner with the employee for managing and expressing their feelings. The employee might say, "Well you know my co-worker's an idiot." You could say "I understand that you might feel much stressed, but you can't be yelling at people in the office" So you're trying to help the person sort of set realistic boundaries for the way they express themselves.

Now the last thing we want to take up is that there are special considerations for dealing with employees who are easily angered. Now easily angered people are those that get angry frequently, it takes less to upset them, they may stay angry for a longer period of time; they may get more upset than most people. But if you're around an easily angered person you know it. This is not a subtle thing. This is something that everyone around that person will know. And uh, we need special strategies for dealing with these people. Because in a real sense, their brain chemistry is different than yours and mine. Some people are just - whether it's genetic or learned I couldn't say - but some people just have the tendency to ignite quickly. It takes almost nothing for them to become suffused with anger. And it's something in their brain chemistry that seems to promote it. These are people who typically lack the ability to calm themselves down. When people get angry, let's say you or I, we find some way to just calm down. You know, we put it in perspective, we talk to a friend, and we go for a hike and appreciate nature. But these easily angered people don't have that. They will ruminate, and ruminate and ruminate. They can't let go of it and it just becomes bigger and bigger the more they think about it. A third aspect is, because anger is such an intrinsic part of their

life, their very comfortable with it. It doesn't upset them the way it would you or me. And then there are two other aspects of it and that is people who blow up and become explosive or collapse in tears because they are so distraught and they do this frequently they recognize that other people are intimidated by that. And they get a sense of power and they may even use it as a tool to intimidate people. They typically have certain mindsets that predispose them to anger. And the most common mindsets are first off, the entitlement mindset and this is the person who feels better than other people, they may have special talents and skills. They may feel that are indispensable and that other people need to respect them and pay special consideration to them and when you don't do it, it really offends them. If you don't do what they say it really offends them. A second group of people who just feel victimized or helpless. They don't feel as though they have any reasonable measure of control over their life and so any little thing can upset them, because they are basically so on edge. Perfectionists and overachievers tend to get angry easily because as a general rule not that many people care as much as they do about doing a good job and they get offended and angry because other people are slackers. And then you have your fourth type of person who is fairly cynical and hostile and has a generally negative attitude towards people.

So in dealing with these anger-prone people, first off you want to be alert to these mind sets. That is what's going on in the background for the person and you're not likely to change their basic personality. So it's kind of like, um, a waste of breath to tell them that they shouldn't get upset, they should be more reasonable, or whatever. It's just not going to make a difference. You want to accept their concerns without necessarily agreeing they're correct, because you can't work with them if they feel you don't feel their concerns are valid. You want to provide reassurance that you understand what their concerns are and you are working towards finding a solvable problem with them and move into problem solutions.

Now problem solving has its own structure and that would be to restore calm discussion. Remembering that you can't solve a problem with somebody who's upset. Your first goal, anymore than you would try to solve a problem with somebody who was drunk or high on drugs, so your first goal is to restore calm discussion. Your second goal is define a solvable problem. Somebody being upset because they don't like their performance appraisal or because they don't like their work assignment or they were passed over for promotion or because you got something that they thought they deserved - those are not solvable problems, those are upsets. A solvable problem is - what can we do about it, what are your goals; what do you want to have happen? And that leads you into exploring a range of options and selecting an option for implementing and follow up.

Now certainly the best thing to do is prevent people from getting upset in the first place. And we could do that by listening more to people. A lot of employees start off as good, well intentioned employees and they gradually get alienated and ticked off and become troublemakers. So when you just listen and let them express their concerns. You don't have to own their concerns, you don't have to do anything about it necessarily but you do owe it to your people to understand what their issues are. Uh, secondly, is pay attention to their perceptions. Very often, people want to treat reality as if that's all that matters. When it's people's perceptions of reality that matter. If you're going out to lunch with a subordinate and in your mind it may be a perfectly fair and reasonable thing to do and you're not doing anything wrong, but it may give the perception to other employees that you're giving special consideration to one person. And so the employees are going to react to their perceptions not necessarily to what's real. So you want to take time to consider their points of view and empower people to speak what's on their minds. Keep them informed. Having people in the dark, the very common decision making pattern in AMS is powerful people to decide what's going to happen and

then inform everybody once it's too late to do anything about it. There's a big gap in between when a problem is starting to be considered and the solution is announced. And in that gap is a lot of anxiety and stress that's very upsetting to people. So keeping people informed and in the loop is often a good thing to do. And when employees do make mistakes, rather than coming down on them with a hammer, it's the time to treat it like a problem solving. "What can we do to make sure this doesn't happen again?"

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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So in summary, in summarizing what we've covered today, we probably should remember the things such as; adrenaline ignites reactive behavior that is highly infectious, the supervisor must resist the tendency to get drawn into anger, but rather remain calm and open to understanding and also present thoughtful questions and understanding by the supervisor can lead the angry person back to their ability to solve problems.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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In conclusion I would also say when we use the term anger, we're not necessarily talking about people who are in advance states of rage, but we're talking about people who are stressed frustrated upset and annoyed. So hopefully, this will be helpful to you in preventing and resolving problems with difficult people. And I want to thank you very much for having had me. We can take questions now.

We have one question... are we still online?

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Yes

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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We have one question; do types of situations lend themselves to ADR and mediation?

That's a very good question. There is, through the ADR program, someone that you can call and talk to and that person will help you figure out a good approach to take with the employee. How to listen, what kind of questions to ask. Then, if necessary, a facilitator or mediator can be brought in. Very often the guidance and suggestions given by the ADR program manager can be very helpful. And these conversations are entirely confidential. No records are kept, no report is made and no one will ever know you called. You can even call after hours, if you make arrangements to do that so you can speak privately from home.

We have another question about issues from home that cause problems at work.

You know, that very often is a big problem for supervisors. The supervisor may have an employee that is dysfunctional because they're so distressed at what's going on at home. The difference, the guideline that's recommended is first off to encourage the employee to use the employee assistance program to get help for their home problem. Then to work with the employee strictly around performance issues. So if the problem at home is causing the employee to make more mistakes or to not be able to function or focus on the work, how can you provide support and assistance? But bearing in mind that as a supervisor you're accountable for that person's performance of their job. So you can support and assist them but, you focus needs to be on helping them do their work and trying not to get too entangled in their personal matters, but to encourage them to use EAP for that.

We had a question about can we print out the presentation pages, what do you think about that Loretta?

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Uh, yeah, sure...we can do that, we can get that to them

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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There's another question, is this presentation based on a specific resource or book?

It's not based on a specific resource or book. But I can tell you a couple of books that you would find extremely helpful, that are geared toward this; one is called crucial conversations, the second is by the same group of authors called crucial confrontations and I'm not thinking of the authors name right now, but, the training institute has copies of the book and you can order it from Amazon.com if you put in CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS you'll get the, probably get the book. Or you can contact Loretta or Jan Williams and they'll help you obtain a copy.

And there another question, about whether this webinar will be available for those are not able to attend.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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Yes it will. It's going to be available in a few days. You will be able to access it through the AGNIS website, from the AMSTI homepage.

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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This is the last questions. The last one that we will have time for. How should you handle employees that are not under your supervision, but who bring issues to you that could be handled using these guides?

I think that the most important guideline that I could offer you is to just be a listening ear for the person. Don't take ownership of the problem, but use these guidelines to just help the person figure out what the problem is that they need to be solving and what they can do about it. For example, if they come to you and say "I've got a problem with my boss. My boss is really unfair. He's not giving me any chance at work assignment that could lead to promotions." You know, you could

ask questions like "Could you give me an example? How often does this happen? Does he do it with other people?" Just any question that pops into your mind that helps you get a feeling of what the issues are. Then you begin by putting the issues into words "So really what you would like to do is figure out how to structure a conversation with your boss?" "Really what you would like to do is figure out how to get a detail." Or really what you would like to do is figure out how to get another job so your work is finished when you have helped the person formulate a problem statement and identify two or three things that they can do. If they are not under your supervision there's not a whole lot you can do to solve their problem. These will get you a long way towards being of help to them and will make a huge difference

Thank you very much Linda. As Linda has already mentioned as one of the resources, the Employee Assistance Program I also wanted to mention at least one other resource here in AMS and that is the AMS Workplace Violence Coordinator and that is Leon Reynolds. He can be reached at 202-720-2374 and email:Leon.Reynolds@AMS.USDA.GOV. We've been having discussion here about some solving problems with employees and also addressing anger. So if you as supervisors experience any situations such as that perhaps you might need additional resources, please consider these resources as well. Well we thank you so very much for all of the participation that you've given us. I just want to remind you of a couple things. The feedback that we'll be getting from you is very important and that just at the end of this webinar there will be a couple of questions on ReadyTalk, we would like to ask if you would provide us with a few minutes of your time to respond to those couple of questions. And also for those of you who are at other locations, to send us into the AMS office through the email address, to send us the number of people who are participating from your particular location. That information, again, will be up there on the screen at the conclusion of this

webinar. So again, I would like to thank all of you for your participation and Dr. Linda Joseph for your insightful information. Are there any closing remarks? Anything you would like to say before the end?

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**LINDA JOSEPH**

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Well, just you folks in AMS are doing a great job and we folks in the public really appreciate what you do. Thank you and thank you for having me.

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**LORETTA GLADDEN**

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You're welcome. Thank you to all of you and we will see you or interact with you again on our next webinar. Thank You.

Ladies and Gentlemen that does conclude today's conference call. We'd like to thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your lines. Thank you and have a great day everyone.

-- END TRANSCRIPT --