



Tough Situations

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:

Toughest

SITUATION:

You supervise someone who was once one of your peers. Or, you now supervise someone who was your supervisor and you have recently been promoted instead of them.

YOUR MISSION:

Ensure that you and he/she enjoy a good working relationship.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO OR SAY:

“Mike, it’s no secret that less than a year ago you and I were working side by side. We were coworkers. Now, my responsibilities have changed and I’m your supervisor. I hope we can work as well together now and into the future as we did when we worked together. Do you have any concerns about me being your supervisor?”

Listen carefully to him/her and be prepared for some push back. His/her responses may sound something like one or more of these:

- *I should have been promoted to this job. I deserved it more than you did.*
- *What’s going to be different now that you’re my supervisor? Can we still be friends?*
- *Nope, I’m glad for you. You deserve to be promoted.*

Regardless of the response you receive, your first action should be to explain to him/her that your role is that of supervisor. You remain the same person you were before you became his/her supervisor. You should say:

“It’s important that you understand that ‘supervisor’ is my role here at XYZ Company, and this role requires me to direct people, make decisions, and perform duties that I didn’t perform in my previous position. Sometimes I will direct you to perform a task,

though I will always try to be polite and courteous. Sometimes I will make decisions, and sometimes you may disagree with them. In those situations I want you to know and understand that I am doing my best to perform my duties and I expect that you will do your best to perform at a high level. Of course, if you ever have any concerns about a decision I'm about to make or a task I've asked you to perform I want you to know I want to listen to them. All you have to do is ask to speak to me about them privately and not challenge me in public, in front of the group. I hope our off-duty relationship as friends won't change and I will do everything possible to make sure it doesn't change. How does that sound?"

WHY IT WILL WORK:

Openness (these days it's also known as *transparency*) is the key to successfully handling this situation and avoiding any hard feelings or more serious difficulties that could arise when leaders find themselves in this situation. Too often leaders assume that situations like this should never be the cause of conflict. It's best to be open about the possibilities it can create and take a proactive position.