

SUPERVISOR TIPS

Responding to Employee Concerns

As supervisors, you're usually the ones who hear about employee concerns first, and how you respond can make the difference between building positive, trusting work relationships or the escalation of the issue and a potential grievance (a formal protest by the Union based on their belief that the District has violated a provision of the MOU). These tips are designed to provide you with effective ways to respond. For more assistance, contact Human Resources:

- **What do I do when an employee airs a concern?**

1. First, listen carefully. Distance yourself emotionally from the subject being discussed
2. Use reflective listening skills to ensure that you understand what the concern is, and what's really bothering the employee.
3. Get specifics and take notes: times, dates, locations, actions,
4. Is there a section of the MOU the employee feels is being violated, or is this a non-MOU general concern?
5. When you have confirmed with the employee that you understood their concerns, ask them what they believe would be an appropriate resolution that would adequately address the issue.

- **What if I don't have the answer or know quite how to respond in the moment?**

Don't feel that you have to give an immediate response if you don't have one. Sometimes you need to do a little research, or talk about the issue with your immediate supervisor or Human Resources. It's okay – just let the employee know that this is what you understand their issue to be, ask them what they feel would be an appropriate resolution to their concern, then let them know you will look into the matter and respond by (give them a specific timeframe) – then follow through!

- **How do I know if this is a "Grievance"?** Ask! If the employee believes that the matter involves the interpretation, application, or enforcement of express terms that are within the MOU, then you should consider and treat this as a Step 1 Grievance. At Step 1, the supervisor has the opportunity to respond and correct the matter. Per MOU provisions, you have up to 7 working days after hearing the employee's Grievance to provide a verbal response. If you recognize an error has been made, inform the employee then correct it immediately – take action and be sure to follow through! If you are "denying" the Grievance, then your oral response must include your reasons for doing so.

- **What if the employee isn't satisfied with my response to their oral/ Step 1**

Grievance? Advise the employee that per MOU provisions (Section 4 for L39; Section 9 for Local 21) he/she has the right to appeal to the next step. Step 2 of the Grievance requires the Union to reduce the matter to writing, resubmit it to you as the Supervisor, and you then have 7 days from the day you received the written Grievance to respond accordingly in writing. You have to include a complete statement of the District's position and the facts upon which it is based, and the proposed remedy or correction being offered by the District, if any. Grievances being appealed beyond Step 3 will now involve the Department Head and/or the General Manager or his/her designee.

- **What's the most important thing to remember about effectively addressing an employee's concern?** Remember that every interaction you have with a staff member can either help or hurt your working relationship. Treat people with courtesy, listen carefully, and be fair and objective. Don't personalize the situation. You may not always be able to resolve the matter the way the employee wanted, but if he/she feels that you listened, treated them with respect and were open to trying to resolve the issue, that will go a long way in establishing the kind of work environment that would make us all feel proud!

