

THE Advisor

Preventing Misunderstandings



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When a team is working with inaccurate information, the result may be extra costs, lost productivity, and wasted time.

A misunderstanding in the workplace may increase the potential for stress or conflict within your team. Common misunderstandings include:

- Confusion about a task or procedure
- Unclear goals, resulting in conflict or infighting
- An atmosphere of uncertainty that leads to gossip or reactionary behavior
- A tense relationship between colleagues because one assumes the other dislikes or distrusts them

- Conflicts due to differences in speaking style, cultural background, or work experience

Misunderstandings are often the result of poor communication. Managers may decrease the risk of misunderstandings by providing clear, specific instructions about policies, procedures, and team goals. To make your message more effective:

- **Meet face-to-face.** Body language, tone of voice, and facial gestures may help you recognize when an employee feels confused or out of their depth. If you can't meet in person, schedule a video conference.
- **Pay attention.** When meeting with an employee or team, stay focused on the person or group and maintain eye contact. This demonstrates respect and emphasizes the importance of your message.
- **Engage in active listening.** Active listening is one of the best ways to avoid misunderstandings. Instead of anticipating the other person's response, listen carefully to what they are saying. Ask open-ended questions that will encourage the person to explain their understanding of the project or situation.

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Good communication is one of the best ways to avoid misunderstandings and keep everyone on the same page.

- **Foster a collaborative environment.** Some employees may be afraid to ask questions or admit that they don't understand an assignment. Creating an environment that encourages open discussion and rewards problem solving will give your team a sense of ownership over shared goals.
- **Encourage growth.** Check in often to make sure your team clearly understands new procedures. Be respectful and positive when providing feedback. If an employee is performing a task for the first time, offer guidance when needed and give them space to make mistakes. Remember that giving your employees a chance to develop new skills may pay dividends over time.

- **Monitor morale.** It may take time for team members to regain confidence in each other after a misunderstanding. These feelings may be more intense if some members of your team have been required to revise work or take on an increased workload to fix the problem. Be empathetic toward those who have been inconvenienced, while also keeping the focus on moving forward and establishing preventative guardrails. Emphasize the importance of reaching team goals.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can provide suggestions for improving individual and team communication. It can also help you address the fallout after a misunderstanding or mistake. Call 24/7/365.



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist with any management concern. Call 24/7/365.

How Do I Say That? Team Conflicts

When differing points of view within your team lead to a tense atmosphere or escalate into conflict, it is important to take action. The following steps may be helpful:

1. Define the conflict. Possibilities include:

- Friction that is interpersonal, interteam, or between cliques
- Disagreements about workflow, processes, or use of resources
- Poor communication
- Harassment or other inappropriate behavior

2. Consult with Human Resources.

HR will review relevant policies and suggest helpful resources. In addition, the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist you with determining how to address the concern. If the conflict is related to bullying or harassment, follow HR's instructions on next steps.

3. Schedule a team meeting. Ask for everyone's perspective regarding the conflict. (If employees seem reluctant to "rock the boat" or fear retaliation, it may be better to have these meetings one-on-one.) Remind all employees of expectations regarding appropriate behavior at work and organizational policies regarding harassment.



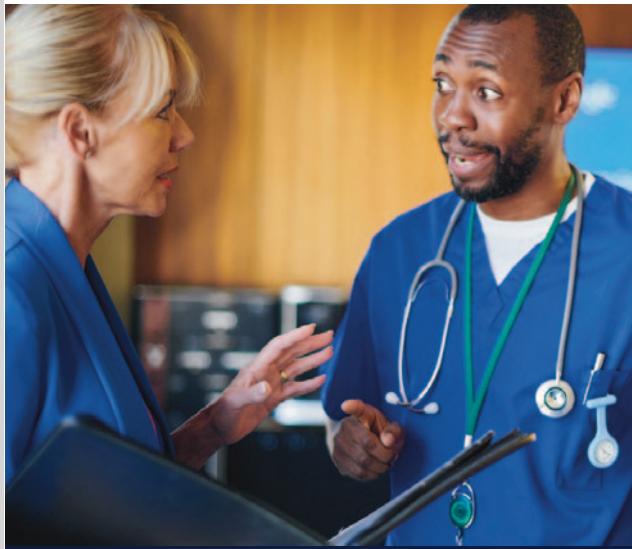
The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can suggest options for addressing conflict within your team.

Sample language: "I know there are differing opinions on how to achieve our goals. Let's consider next steps."

4. Chart a path forward. Look for ways to incorporate your team's ideas into efforts to improve workflow and team functioning. Let your team know that you have heard their concerns and respect their contributions.

5. Refer to LifeMatters. Remind your team that LifeMatters can assist with managing stress and improving communication skills. If an individual employee's work performance is off track, meet with them privately to make a performance referral.

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LifeMatters offers 24/7/365 assistance with management concerns. We're here to help.

Sample language: "LifeMatters can help you cope with work and personal concerns. I urge you to call."

6. **Follow up.** Meet with your team at a later date to review any changes and make adjustments as needed. If conflicts persist and you feel disciplinary action may be warranted, consult with HR first.

If conflict is creating chaos or making it difficult to reach team goals, the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help. Call 24/7/365.

Management Consultation

Whenever you need it, as often as you need it. Reasons to call:

- Confronting an employee about performance issues
- An employee's personal problem
- Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- Establishing expectations for performance
- Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- Your own personal concerns
- Any other work-related issue

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Call collect to **262-574-2509** if outside of North America

Language assistance services in your preferred spoken and written languages are available at no cost by calling 1-800-367-7474.

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