

# THE **Advisor**

## Managing During an Election Year



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*As election season heats up, disagreements between colleagues may become more pronounced.*

Fundamental differences in political and ideological views can sometimes result in strained work relationships. These tensions may increase in the lead-up to or aftermath of an election.

Often, these personality clashes aren't just about specific issues in the news. They may also be driven by core beliefs that those with a different perspective on politics or social issues should be viewed with suspicion. Individuals who are unable to manage their feelings could behave in ways that impact team dynamics. Disrespectful behavior, conflict, and even harassment might occur.

If election year tension is creating conflict within your team, these tips may help:

- **Treat others with respect.** People often make judgments about colleagues based on external criteria, such as their appearance or clothing. Personal details, such as where someone went to school or their tastes in music or entertainment, may also lead to being perceived as on a given "side." Encourage your team to avoid stereotyping or labeling others.
- **Review relevant policies.** Provide your team with copies of any policy related to political expression at work, including limits on clothing or personal items bearing a candidate's likeness or political slogans. Share the organization's harassment and social media policies as well.
- **Set clear expectations.** Make it clear that employees are expected to collaborate with colleagues to accomplish team goals, regardless of their personal feelings.
- **Encourage healthy communication.** Emphasize the importance of active listening and communicating in a respectful manner. Make collaboration and compromise



*If an employee's behavior is affecting team wellbeing or productivity, contact the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service.*

key pillars of both individual and team success. Keep the focus on shared goals.

- **Monitor sensitive situations.** Over time, you may become aware of simmering conflicts, either between individual employees or between different cliques or sub-teams. Promptly address overt actions, such as bullying, gossip, or disruptive outbursts, in accordance with company policy. If the friction between employees does not reach this level, but is still causing tension within your team, consult with the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service. See “How Do I Say That?” on the next page for additional guidance.

- **Check your own behavior.** Set a good example by keeping your own feelings about the election or social issues out of the workplace. If you post about your personal views on social media, limit your followers to non-work friends and family.
- **Establish a safe space.** Sometimes, an organization may be perceived as “taking a side” on a social or political issue. Strive to create a healthy environment that helps your team stay focused on their work. If members of the public are being disruptive, follow safety procedures.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can provide strategies for managing conflict between team members, both during and after the election. We're here to help.



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

## How Do I Say That? Handling a Confrontation

Social or political tensions that boil over could result in a workplace confrontation. Conflict could develop between employees or cliques with differing views, or between an external party (such as a customer or vendor) and an employee. Here are some tips for handling both types of disagreements.

If the confrontation is between two or more employees:

- 1. Address it promptly.** Angry outbursts and other disruptive behaviors should be addressed as a performance issue. Talk to HR about any relevant policies. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can provide assistance as well.
- 2. Schedule a private meeting with each person.** Clearly state your expectations for respectful collaboration.

**Sample language:** “I realize you may not agree with your colleague(s) about politics or social issues. However, I expect you to treat all of your co-workers with respect, regardless of your personal feelings.”

- 3. Establish consequences.** Outline what actions will be taken if the infighting continues. If warranted, make a performance referral to LifeMatters. Always consult with HR before taking any disciplinary action.



*The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist with addressing conflict.*

**Sample language:** “This behavior damages team morale and increases stress in the workplace. Continued conflicts or infighting will result in (state consequences).”

- 4. Follow up.** Periodically check in with the individuals involved to monitor the situation and answer any questions.

If the confrontation is between an employee and an outside party:

- 1. Have a plan in place.** Let employees know that they should find you or another manager if a vendor, customer, or other outside party engages in disruptive, aggressive, or threatening behavior.



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

- 2. Listen.** Allowing the outside party to speak their mind without reaction or judgment may de-escalate the situation.
- 3. Don't engage.** Avoid being pulled into a debate. Focus on what you can do to assist the person within the scope of the services your organization provides.
- 4. Follow company policy.** If the person becomes aggressive or uses abusive language, call security or follow company procedures for maintaining a safe workplace.

## 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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