



Do you have an idea for your organization that you'd like to share with your supervisor? Maybe you'd like see a change occur, maybe there is a new role you are interested in, or maybe you see a new possibility for the organization? Unless you talk with your supervisor and let them know your idea, chances are, it's not going to happen.

This month, we sat down with Karen Eichner, Human Resource Director at National Air Cargo, Inc. and an EAP Communications trainer, to discuss how to have a direct and respectful conversation like this with your supervisor "No one can fix something if they don't know it is broken," Eichner says. "When you see something that you feel is important, or when you have a valuable idea, it's up to you to let your supervisor know. Change starts with you."

Understanding your Emotions

Eichner admits that anticipating a discussion with your supervisor can be nerve-racking. You may worry that the supervisor won't listen to your ideas, that they may not implement the changes you feel necessary, or that you may receive a negative reaction. All of these worries can get in the way of bringing new ideas to your supervisor. "Getting to the actual conversation is half the battle," Eichner says. "Remember that your ideas and needs are important, and that you have a right to have a conversation, at least."

Don't wait too long

The moment you feel that something isn't right or that you

have an idea that could help a situation," Eichner says, "ask to set up a time to have a conversation with your supervisor." By setting up an appointment, you are able to make sure that you will be given the time you need for the discussion, and it allows you to have that discussion in private.

In-Person Conversation is best

Eichner recommends having an in-person conversation with your supervisor, if possible. If an in-person conversation is too uncomfortable given the nature of the topic, or if talking with your supervisor in person is not possible, a phone call, email, or letter are appropriate methods too, depending on what works best for you and your supervisor. However, Eichner emphasizes that meeting in person may be the key to developing understanding. "Always keep in mind that an email or a letter is not a conversation, it's only an opportunity for you to state your side of the issue."

Prepare ahead of time

When you are having the conversation with your supervisor, "come prepared with facts, not emotions," Eichner advises. Give your supervisor only the information about the specific issue you are there to discuss. If you are discussing a situation that needs to change, "be honest, but avoid blame." When you leave out your emotional reactions and focus on how things can get better, your supervisor can more clearly understand the the issue you are raising without feeling attacked.

It is wise to also come to the conversation with multiple ways in which your idea may be implemented or your issue may be solved. This will show that you are dedicated to troubleshooting issues in the workplace and come up with solutions on your own. "Bringing solutions to the conversation also implies you both have a shared responsibility for the solution," Eichner says, "and this is an excellent basis for positive change."

If you would like to work on strategies for communicating with your supervisor or co-workers, you can reach out to your EAP to schedule a counseling session with one of our EAP Clinicians.