

Navigating Workplace Dynamics



Effective leadership goes beyond strategy and decision-making—it requires the ability to navigate complex workplace dynamics with ease. As a manager, the way you handle employee relations situations can shape team morale, workplace culture, and overall organizational stability.

This course is designed to strengthen your knowledge and skills in managing these challenges, providing you with practical tools for communication, documentation, and intervention.

[Click START COURSE above to begin.](#)



Welcome



The Cost of Neglect



Defining Employee Relations Issues



Federal and State Employment Law



NAPA Company and Employment Policies

Assessing Employee Relations Issues

Taking Appropriate Action

Summary of Key Points

Welcome

Introduction

Welcome to the *Navigating Workplace Dynamics* course. This course focuses on your ability to effectively handle employee issues through more informed decision-making and interaction skills.

By mastering these principles, you will not only foster a more positive and productive work environment but also **reduce preventable escalations** of employee relations issues. With a structured approach, you will feel equipped to engage with employees confidently, ensuring fair resolutions while maintaining compliance and professionalism.

Learning Objectives

By the completion of this course, you will be able to:



Recognize, reinforce, and apply pertinent internal and external employment policies in everyday employee interactions.



Use critical-thinking and decision-making skills to assess the nature and severity of the issue and determine the appropriate course of action to address employee relations issues.

☐

Communicate policy and/or behavior expectations to employees with consistency and fairness.

☐

Ensure equitable, clear, and accurate documentation by adhering to internal NAPA standards and guidelines.

☐

Foster proactive problem-solving and collaboration with People Team partners and other stakeholders.

Let's get started by considering common workplace dynamics that you may encounter as a leader.

CONTINUE

The Cost of Neglect

What Can Go Wrong?

Let's look at a few examples of how neglected employee relations issues can escalate into problems that impact more than just the employee.

Click on each employee image below to review four common employee relations issues.



*Click on each employee below
to learn more about the cost of neglecting employee relations issues.*



What do all of these scenarios have in common?

Each of these scenarios represent employee relations issues that when ignored, present serious **financial**, **legal**, and **reputational consequences**.

The Cost of Neglect

Neglecting employee relations issues can lead to disengaged teams, costly legal disputes, and a damaged workplace culture. When managers overlook conflicts, fairness concerns, or compliance risks, small problems can escalate into serious disruptions—resulting in lost productivity, increased turnover, and financial penalties.

Proactive management, clear communication, and structured intervention strategies are essential in preventing these avoidable consequences and fostering a

Unaddressed tensions may also undermine trust, making it harder to lead effectively and maintain a motivated workforce.

respectful, high-performing environment.

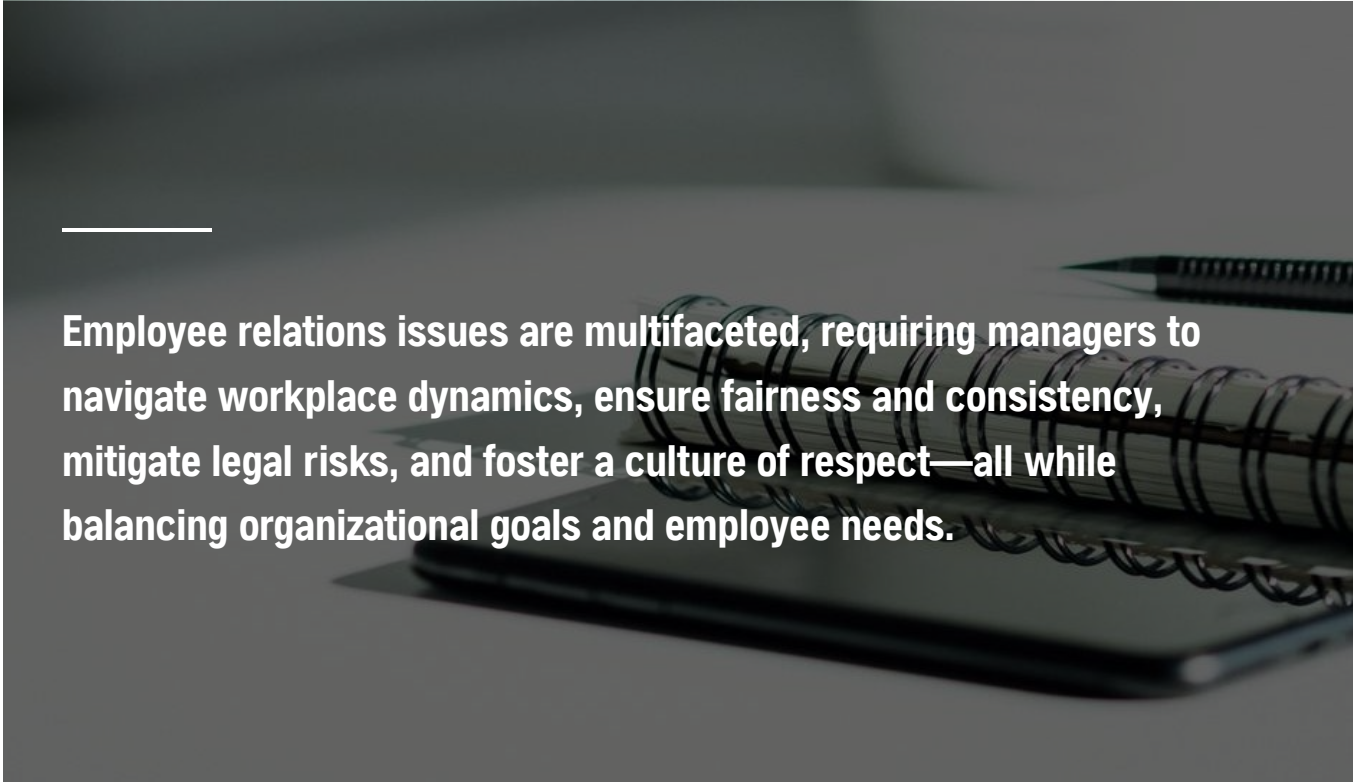
As you progress through this course, we will revisit these scenarios to consider how they might have been handled to avoid these outcomes.

Keep in mind that these are all very real situations that can happen anywhere, anytime.

Next, let's define what we mean by "employee relations" issues.

CONTINUE

Defining Employee Relations Issues



Employee relations issues are multifaceted, requiring managers to navigate workplace dynamics, ensure fairness and consistency, mitigate legal risks, and foster a culture of respect—all while balancing organizational goals and employee needs.

What are employee relations issues?

Employee relations issues can be simple or complex. Much of the complexity has to do with the nature of the issue, as well as the severity.

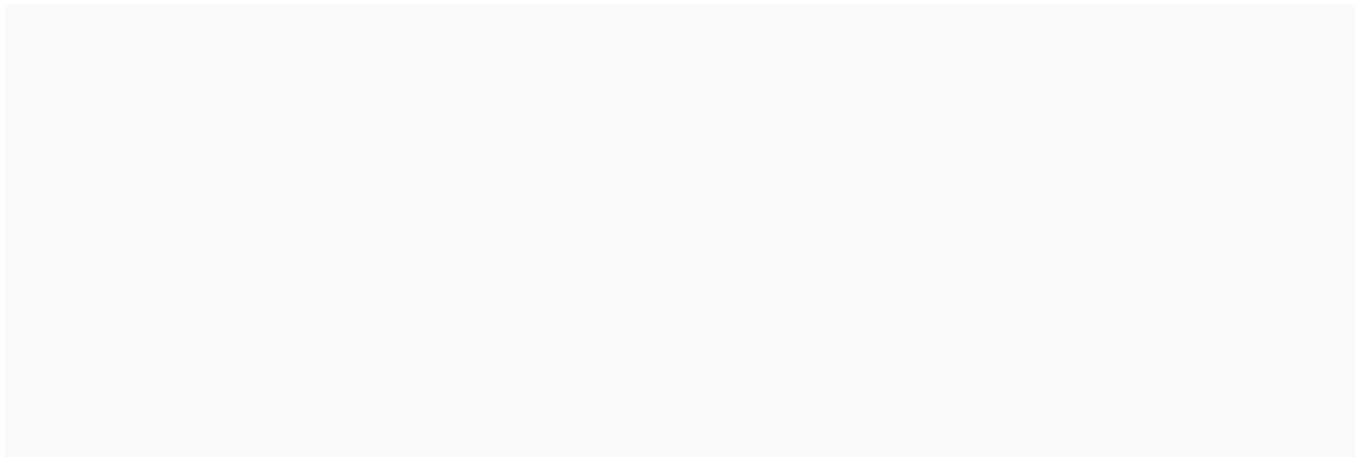
So, what defines an employee relations issue?

An employee relations issue is any interaction of an employee within the organization during their employment that affects their well-being, performance and productivity, or compliance with internal and external policies and guidelines.

Typically, employee relations issues may be related to one or more of these categories:

- **Company policy:** When an employee violates established company policies, procedures, or protocol.
- **Employment law:** When established federal, state, and local employment laws and protections are broken and they impact one or more employees.
- **Performance and productivity:** When an employee is not meeting job expectations or standards.
- **Interpersonal conflict:** When two or more employees engage in a personal or work disagreement.

Click on each card below to review examples of each type of employee relations issue.



Company Policy

Examples: attendance, personal appearance, social media use, use of company equipment or resources

Employment Law

Examples: EEO protections, sexual harassment, leave of absence, work hazards

Performance

Examples: Missed deadlines, not meeting goals, performance discipline

Interpersonal Conflict

Examples: personality conflicts, bullying, team conflict

As a manager, it is important that you are able to proactively identify potential employee relations issues, recognize the risks involved with neglecting them, and address them appropriately. Later on, you will learn how to assess the severity of employee relations issues and take action before they become bigger problems.

Next up, let's examine some internal and external policies and laws that govern the employee experience.

CONTINUE

Federal and State Employment Law

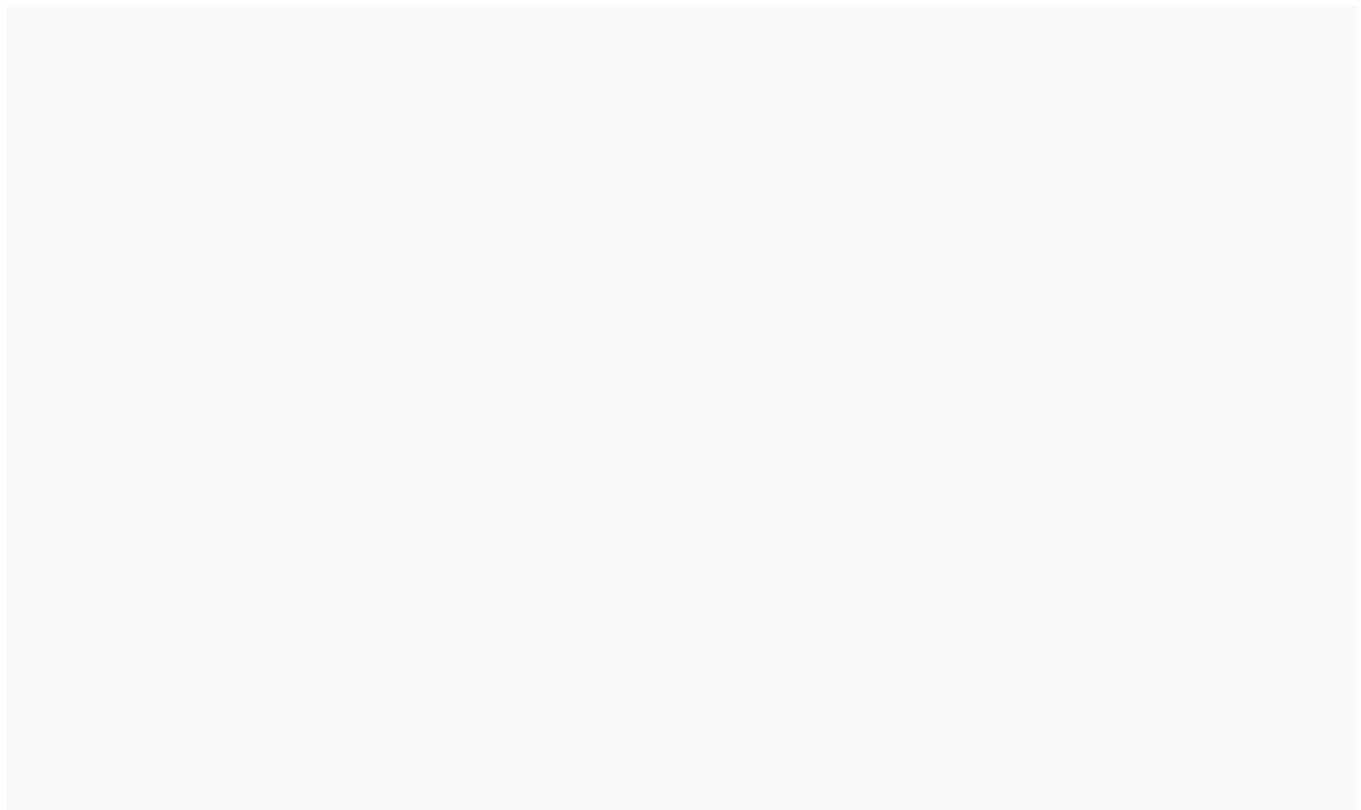
Employment Laws: Protecting Worker Needs

Over the years, US employment laws have evolved to protect individuals and ensure that organizations are treating all employees fairly, consistently, and within the law.

All organizations need to comply with federal, state, and local employment laws.

These various laws are designed to protect individuals throughout the employee lifecycle, from recruiting/hiring through to retirement.

Click on the video below to learn about six key regulations that protect employees.





Let's see how much you remember from the video.

CONTINUE

Knowledge Check

Match the employment law with the correct description by dragging the card on the left to the correct card on the right.

⋮ Title VII of the Civil Rights Act

Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

⋮ Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Mandates workplace safety standards to prevent hazards and injuries.

⋮ Equal Employment Opportunity Protections

Governs minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards.

⋮ Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

These protections stem from a variety of laws that ensure fair treatment in hiring, promotions, wages, and workplace conditions.

⋮ Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)

Requires reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities and prohibits discrimination.

⋮ Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

Grants eligible employees unpaid leave for family or medical reasons while protecting their job.

SUBMIT



Important Note: You are not expected to be a legal expert, but you should be familiar with the basic parameters of these laws and the types of situations where they may apply to your employees.

If you are dealing with any employment laws, always consult with your People Team or the Employee Relations Team.

Federal Employment Law Resources

If you are interested in learning more about the above laws, or other important federal laws that protect employees, below is a list of resources for further reading.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Laws

Provides an overview of EEO laws that are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

[**CLICK HERE**](#)

Employment Law Guide

Describes the major statutes and regulations administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) that affect businesses and workers.

[CLICK HERE](#)

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Offers compliance assistance, interactive tools, and detailed guides on workplace laws.

[CLICK HERE](#)

Each state enforces additional employment laws in the workplace, let's briefly look at how they might differ from federal employment laws.

CONTINUE

What About State Employment Laws?

State employment laws vary widely and often provide additional protections beyond federal regulations.

Leaders should be aware of their specific state employment laws and some of the possible differences between state and federal regulations.

Click through the interaction below to learn more about some key differences.

State Employment Laws

Step 2

Wage and Hour Laws

- States may set higher minimum wages than the federal standard.
- Overtime rules can differ, with some states requiring daily overtime pay.
- Some states have pay transparency laws, requiring salary disclosures in job postings.

Step 3

Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Laws

- Many states expand protected classes beyond federal law (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity).
- Some states mandate harassment prevention training for employees and managers.

Step 4

Leave Policies

- States may offer paid family and medical leave, beyond the federal FMLA.
- Sick leave laws vary, with some requiring paid sick days for all employees.

Step 5

Workplace Safety

- Some states have stricter OSHA standards or industry-specific safety requirements.

Know Your State Laws

Check with your People Team for state specific employment laws that may apply to your work location.



Important Note: You are not expected to be a legal expert, but you should be familiar with the basic parameters of these laws and the types of situations where they may apply to your employees.

If you are dealing with any employment laws, consult with your People Team or the Employee Relations team

In addition to federal, state, and local laws, employees are also required to follow NAPA company policies and guidelines. Let's explore those next.

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NAPA Company and Employment Policies

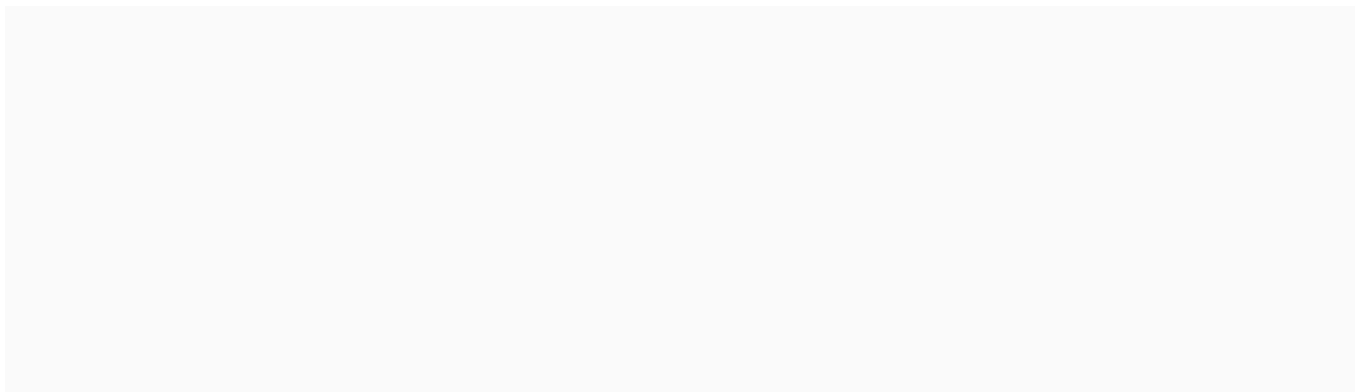
NAPA Employee Policies

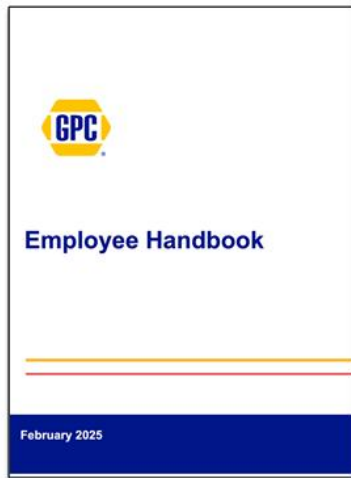
In addition to the various federal, state, and local laws that govern the employee experience, organizations have their own employment policies that help to support legal compliance, fairness and consistency, operational efficiency, and risk management. As a new manager, you should be familiar with many of these internal policies through your orientation and the Civil Treatment training.

All employees should be familiar with the **GPC Employee Handbook**.

Overview of the GPC Employee Handbook

Expand each component below by clicking on the "+" to learn more about the sections of the GPC Employee Handbook.





**Let's look at another important policy document - the
International Code of Conduct and Ethics.**

CONTINUE

International Code of Conduct and Ethics

Another important internal employee policy document is the International Code of Conduct and Ethics, or Integrity at Work. This document serves as a compass for

ethical decision-making and responsible business practices. It includes key ethical issues spanning from the internal workplace, the company, our customers and suppliers and our communities.

NAPA Employment Resources

As a people leader, it is critical that you know the resources to find information and are familiar with the internal policies that we hold our employees accountable for in their day-to-day interactions.

GPC Employee Handbook

A comprehensive set of workplace and employee policies and guidelines.

[CLICK HERE](#)

International Code of Conduct and Ethics

The Code of Conduct (Code) serves as our compass for ethical decision-making and responsible business practices. More than a document, it reflects who we are and how we behave – One GPC Team driven by our SPIRIT values and dedicated to upholding the trust placed in us by our teammates, customers, suppliers, communities and shareholders.

[CLICK HERE](#)

US Automotive Group (USAG) Attendance Policy

Attendance policy for all USAG part-time and full-time employees.

[CLICK HERE](#)

GPC Connect

This links to the Policies page on GPC Connect.

[CLICK HERE](#)

Now that we have reviewed various employee laws, policies, and guidelines, let's move on to a process for assessing employee relations issues.

CONTINUE

Assessing Employee Relations Issues

A Decision-Making Process for Employee Relations Issues

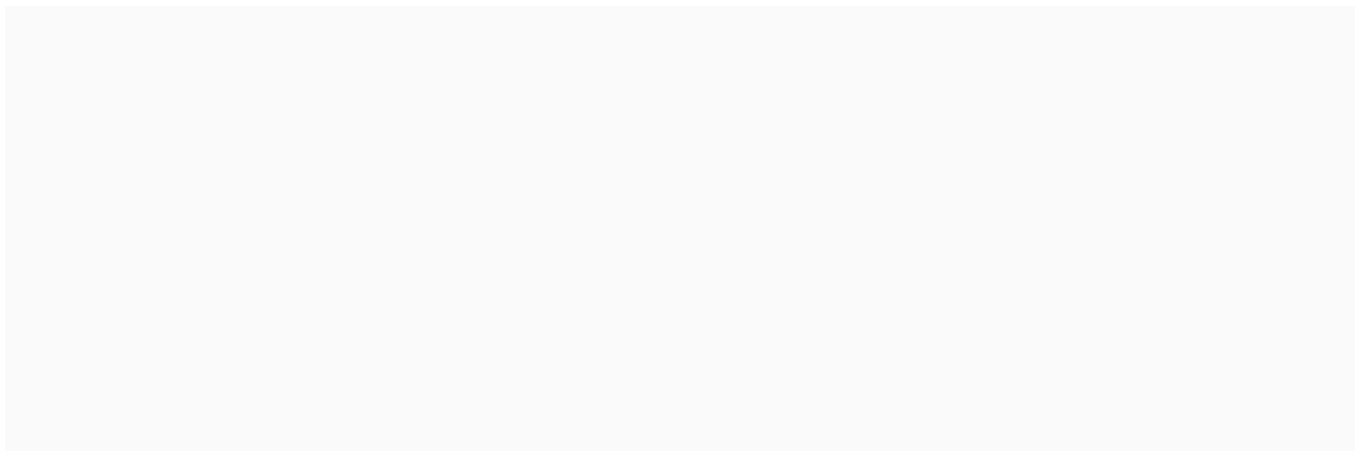
As a people leader, you deal with employee issues daily.

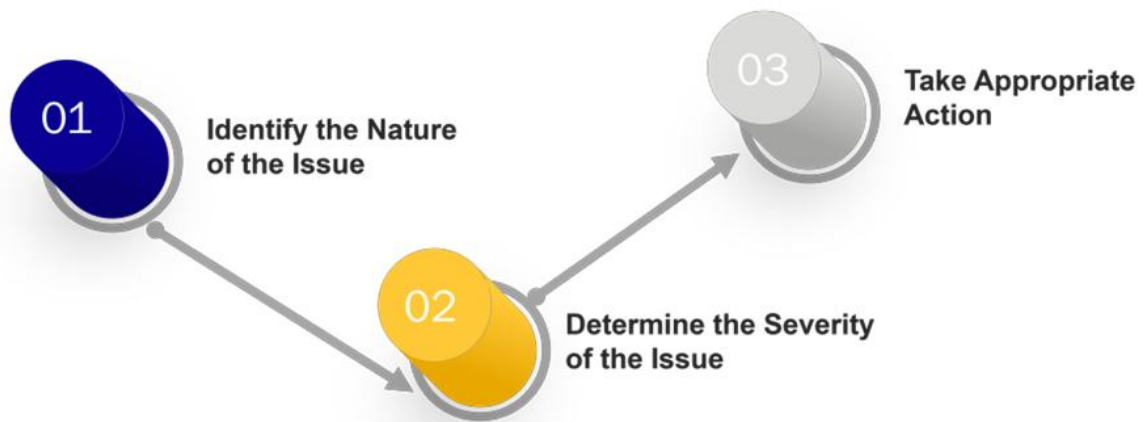
Some issues may be common, such as attendance or personal appearance, while others may be more complex, like interpersonal conflict between employees. When navigating employee relations issues, you can approach situations using a series of questions that help determine your response.

The steps below outline a high-level decision-making process to help you navigate various employee relations issues.

Important: As a manager, you should never conduct an investigation on your own. Your role is to listen carefully, take accurate notes to document what you observe or are told, and identify any immediate safety concerns. If there is a safety risk, address it promptly following your company's policies. For all other issues, notify the People Team or the Ethics/Employee Relations team, who will conduct any necessary investigations and determine appropriate next steps.

Click on each stage of the assessing diagram below to learn more.





Always Take Employee Issues Seriously

IMPORTANT NOTE: Always take every employee relations issue seriously. If you feel that the issues may pose immediate harm to people and/or property, contact the necessary authorities as soon as possible. This may be your local security team, or law enforcement. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

Let's practice determining the severity of different employee relations issues.

CONTINUE

Determining the Severity of the Issue Activity

Review each situation below and determine the severity by dragging it to the appropriate card pile.

Low Severity

An employee arrives 15 minutes late to work.

An employee requests bereavement time for a family death.

An employee has exceeded their vacation time by two days.

An employee is frustrated with a slow moving project.

High Severity

Two employees engage in a verbal shouting match in front of customers.

An employee shows up to work with alcohol on his breath.

An employee is injured when a stack of boxes fall on her head in the warehouse.

An employee tells you she is being bullied by a colleague.

Not Sure/Need More Information

An employee emails you about needing a leave of absence for personal reasons.

An employee has missed his monthly sales targets two months in a row.

You hear from a colleague that two of your managers are dating.

Every employee relations situation is unique - so take the time to consider the frequency, impact, and risks. If you are unsure about how employment law or policy may apply, use the appropriate resources.

CRITICAL REMINDERS

- **Mandatory Reporting Requirements: There are specific types of concerns that must be reported without exception, including:**
 - **Harassment**
 - **Discrimination**
 - **Retaliation**
 - **Hostile Work Environment**
 - **Financial Accounting irregularities or concerns**
- **Do Not Investigate Mandatory Reporting Concerns Yourself:**
To protect both the employee and the company, managers must not conduct their own investigations into these mandatory reporting issues. Instead, refer these matters directly to the People Team or Ethics/Employee Relations team for appropriate handling.

We will cover how to take appropriate actions in greater detail in the next module.

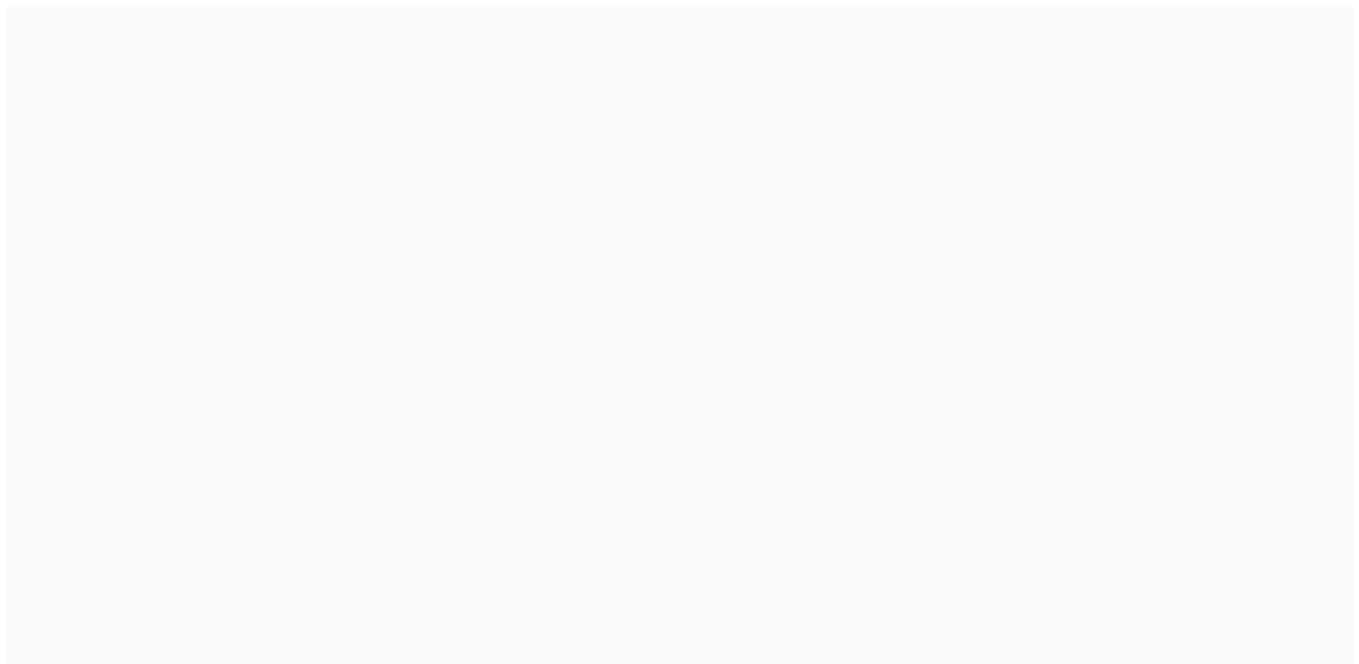
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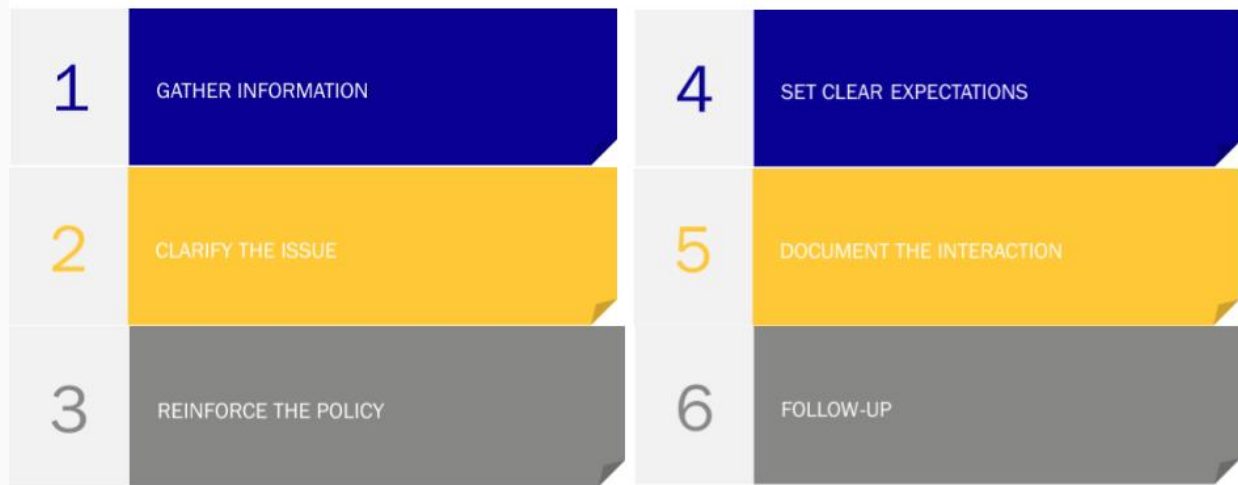
Taking Appropriate Action

Common Intervention Strategies

Every employee relations issue that you deal with requires an intervention approach that is appropriate to the nature and severity of the issue. However, there are common strategies that you can always apply to most situations regardless of the issue. Of course there will be variances, especially if the issue is egregious or requires mandatory reporting because it is highly legal in nature.

Click on each of the strategies in the diagram below to learn more. Click the X to close each text box.





Now that we have laid out the six interaction strategies, let's go back to our original scenarios from the "Cost of Neglect" module, and review how early manager intervention may have changed the outcomes.

CONTINUE

The Cost of Neglect Scenarios

In the beginning of this course, you were presented with four scenarios that ended badly because of manager negligence in addressing the employee relations issues.

These four scenarios dealt with a variety of employee relations issues from safety in the workplace to reasonable accommodation. If each manager in the scenario had been proactive and used early intervention, these scenario outcomes may have been very different.

Let's revisit two of these scenarios (Javier and Carson), considering how things might have gone if their managers had used the intervention strategies to address the issue early in the process.

Click on each individual employee image to hear how the stories may have ended with early intervention. Click play to start each video.



Click on each employee below to learn more about how their story might have been different if their managers had intervened early and taken action using the six intervention strategies.



Now that you have seen how the intervention strategies can reduce escalated employee relations issues, let's practice with our other two employee scenarios.

CONTINUE



Karla's Story: Reasonable Accommodation

Karla works in the stockroom and manages inventory tasks that often require reaching high shelves. She has a diagnosed disability affecting her balance and stability. She approaches her manager requesting reasonable accommodation to avoid using the step.

Karla's Story: Reasonable Accommodation

What is the severity of this issue at this point in time?

- ☐ **Low-Medium.** She has been doing the job fine and now wants to have some accommodation to help her out. She is at risk of falling off the ladder and so it should be investigated at some point in the future.
- ☐ **High.** Karla has a disability and is requesting reasonable accommodation to ensure that she can continue to perform her job functions.

SUBMIT

Karla's Story: Reasonable Accommodation

How should Karla's manager employ the intervention strategy of GATHER INFORMATION to assist in this request?

- ☐ Do nothing. Since it's dealing with the Americans with Disabilities Act, her manager should just refer Karla to HR and have her submit a request for accommodation.
- ☐ Karla's manager should immediately notify his HR representative who should meet with her to get more details about her specific needs and request and start the formal request process. Her manager should also partner with HR to consider providing her with a temporary accommodation to avoid any accidents during the evaluation period.
- ☐ Her manager should immediately modify Karla's job duties to prevent her from having an accident. He does not need to contact his HR representative since he modified her work.

SUBMIT

The Bottom-Line: Reasonable Accommodation

Providing reasonable accommodations is not only a legal obligation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but also a vital aspect of fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace. In Karla's case, her request stems from a medically diagnosed disability that affects her ability to safely climb ladders—a task in her stockroom role. Employers must assess whether her duties can be modified or if alternate solutions, such as reorganizing stock placement or assigning ladder tasks

to others, can be implemented without creating undue hardship. The goal is to explore effective, practical adjustments that allow Karla to perform the essential functions of her job while ensuring her safety and dignity, without creating a new position, which should be avoided.

Equally important is maintaining open, ongoing communication throughout the accommodation process. This includes timely engagement with the HR representative, who serves as a key partner in evaluating Karla's needs, facilitating medical documentation, and determining suitable modifications. Clear dialogue between the employee, manager, and HR helps prevent misunderstandings, ensures legal compliance, and reinforces a culture of respect. Remember, accommodations are not one-time decisions—they often require follow-up and refinement over time.

A collaborative, good-faith approach benefits not only the employee but the entire workplace.

Let's look at our final employee issue and how it may have been addressed differently.

CONTINUE



Darnell's Story: Social Media Missteps

Darnell, a senior field sales rep, takes new hire Thomas on a visit to a car dealership client. During the visit, Darnell pulls out his phone and plays a sexually suggestive video clip from his TikTok feed for the client's receptionist and sales staff. The clients appear uncomfortable but say nothing. Thomas, feeling uneasy, reports the incident confidentially to his manager in their weekly one-on-one meeting.

Darnell's Story: Social Media Missteps

What is the severity of this issue at this point in time?



Low - Medium. Darnell is known as a joker, and so it's just part of how he interacts with his clients. As long as Thomas and the client understands it was only a joke, it's no big deal.



High. Darnell is potentially creating a hostile work environment, and this is a serious offense.

SUBMIT

Darnell's Story: Social Media Missteps

How should Darnell's manager employ the intervention step of GATHER INFORMATION to address this issue?

- ☐ He should do nothing and contact his HR representative.
- ☐ He should take detailed notes documenting everything Thomas stated and promptly provide this information to his HR representative of Ethics/Employee Relations Team. Concerns related to a hostile work environment are mandatory reporting issues that must be reported and investigated by HR or the Ethics/Employee Relations Team. Managers must not conduct their own investigations.
- ☐ He should speak with Thomas and get the details about what happened at the client site. He should also contact any of the clients who may have witnessed Darnell's actions and get additional information from them.

SUBMIT

Darnell's Story: Social Media Missteps

How should Darnell's manager employ the intervention step of CLARIFY THE ISSUE and REINFORCE THE POLICY when meeting with Darnell?

- ☐ Ask Darnell to explain what happened at the client site. Share the details he has gathered, including the facts provided by Thomas and the client. Explain to Darnell that there is zero tolerance for this type of behavior and it must stop immediately. Reinforce that no retaliation toward Thomas or the client will be tolerated as well. Document the conversation and agreements made with Darnell, providing a copy of the conversation to his HR representative.
- ☐ Explain to Darnell that the issue was shared with him by Thomas and to be more careful who he shares videos with in the future. Document the conversation in Darnell's file.
- ☐ Ask Darnell to explain what happened at the client site. Explain the harassment policy to Darnell, and tell him that he should not do it anymore. Document the conversation in Darnell's file.


SUBMIT

The Bottom-Line: Hostile Work Environment

When Darnell, a senior sales rep, shares an inappropriate TikTok video in front of clients and a new hire, it's not just poor judgment—it opens the door to a potentially hostile work environment. **Even if the intent was not malicious, impact matters more than intent.** What one person views as harmless, another may experience as offensive or exclusionary. That perception becomes especially critical in client-facing moments or when newer team members are still building trust. Left unaddressed, these moments can erode team morale, damage reputations, and contribute to a culture where inappropriate behavior is normalized.

It's the responsibility of leadership to act swiftly and thoughtfully. Managers must recognize these incidents as more than just awkward slip-ups—they are red flags requiring prompt action. Reinforcing a zero-tolerance approach to harassment protects everyone and sends a clear message: professionalism and respect are non-negotiable. And perhaps most importantly, employees who report concerns must be met with support and protection from retaliation.

A culture of safety and accountability does not emerge by accident—it's cultivated, moment by moment, decision by decision.



Thoughtful and early intervention can make a big difference in reducing the escalation of various employee relations issues.

You are almost done, let's briefly review some key points and final thoughts.

CONTINUE

Summary of Key Points

Summary of Key Points

Below is a summary of key points that every manager should know when it comes to assessing and navigating employee relations issues.

Place a check-mark in the box once you have reviewed each key point.

☐

Leaders Are Not Expected to Be Experts: You are not expected to be an expert in employee relations or legal matters. Your role is to recognize issues early and take appropriate steps by engaging the right resources.

☐

Know When and Where to Ask for Help: If you encounter any employee relations issues that feel complex or beyond your expertise, especially those involving potential legal or ethical concerns, ask for help promptly. Use your People Partner, HR, or Ethics/Employee Relations team as your primary resources.

☐

Communication with Employees is Critical: Regardless of the severity or type of concern, managers should always communicate with the employee involved. Let them know

whether you are addressing the issue yourself or have referred it to the People Team or Ethics/Employee Relations team. This builds trust and transparency. Make sure employees know they can reach out to you for an update on the status of the issue and the process, fostering open communication and support.

Let's wrap up this course with a few final thoughts.

CONTINUE

Final Thoughts

As a manager, you are often in the best position to spot issues early. By acting appropriately and involving the right partners, you help maintain a safe, respectful, and compliant workplace.

Remember, the People Team partners are here to support you. When in doubt, reach out early to ensure the issue is handled appropriately and consistently with company policies and legal requirements.

CONTINUE