

CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

There are some conflicts you won't be able to diffuse alone. There are situations that are bigger than you are and additional resources have to be brought in to help. As chair of the Grievance Committee, my door is open to any PSA member. All they have to do is make a phone call or e-mail me. Write me a letter if you prefer, and I will come to your office or wherever you are. I'm here, morning, noon, and night. It's no problem. I'll inform you of your options and let you know everything that could possibly take place—the hypotheticals as well as the



Gail

DAVIS

Bill Cawley Award Winner

Retired Associate Director of Athletics and former PSA@RIC President Gail Davis, received

the Bill Cawley Award on February 9, 2003, for her contribution to Rhode Island athletics.

Scott Gibbons presented the award, and on hand to support her was PSA@RIC President Brian Rob Bower, former PSA@RIC President Brian Allen, and Treasurer Kathryn Sasso. Gail Davis gave over twenty-five years of service to RIC student-athletes. Looking back she says,

"What I am most proud of is that I have been able to make a positive contribution to athletics. One of the biggest changes [in RIC athletics] is that student-athletes are seeking us out now. We have a good reputation, good programs, and our facilities have improved

d r a m a t i c a l l y . "

THE PSA@RIC REPORT

The Professional Staff Association at Rhode Island College



March 2003 Issue

PROFILES OF OUR PROFESSIONALS E Q U A L P A R T N E R S I N E D U C A T I O N

GEORGE AGUIAR

CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

George Aguiar has spent most of his career as a manager. He was in charge of a supermarket chain for 23 of 25 years and has been assistant director of housekeeping at RIC for the past eighteen years, supervising seventy-two employees (the largest group on campus). George is also a very active member of PSA. He chairs the PSA@RIC Grievance Committee, the Blue Cross Committee, and the Political Action Committee. George is by far one of the most trusted and respected professional. In this article he talks about the communication collisions between supervisors and employees. Pullout quotes are from the book Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.

there will be.

For the twenty-three years I was a manager in private industry, I held a meeting every Friday. It was mostly a rap session about where we all made mistakes—including my own—or where we could have done a better job. Some of the greatest ideas came out of those meetings. From the managers, to the president, to the CEO, down to the lowest category part-time employee, we are all aware that we are part of a collective team and that we can't survive if we don't act that way. To take the time to listen to my employees was worth a million dollars in employee relations.

Most employees come to work wanting to do a good job and wanting to be recognized. You can show you recognize them by keeping them informed and by finding out what they think, listening to and respecting their opinions. Some of the greatest CEOs out there—for example,

I think the major cause of conflict in the workplace is misinformation. We misinterpret something that is written or conveyed verbally, which is why it's so important that supervisors keep employees informed. The more you bring your employees into the fold, the less communication problems

The PSA@RIC Report

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Mr. Lee Iacoco, former head of the Chrysler Corporation—said he would come down and sit with the production crew everyday at lunchtime. There were a number of shifts, so he would eat very light lunches. He would probably have three or four lunches a day. But he learned a great deal from the employees and he learned about the shortcomings in production.

All things being equal, this may not be able to be done in other agencies, but it was enlightening to hear that the regular, hourly, productive employees had some tremendous ideas for the company. It was an experience that if translated throughout the industrial nations would prove very helpful.

Imagine that everyone you know and everyone you meet are all here to teach you something.

Your job is to determine what the people in your life

are trying to teach you. You'll find that

if you do this, you'll be far less annoyed,

bothered, and frustrated by the actions and

imperfections of other people.

I also believe in thanking employees for a job well done. It is an e-mail or a letter and then follow-up with a personal phone call or a personal sit-down. There are faculty and administration and students who send me thank-you letters. I tell them I would prefer to have the letters sent to the individuals who actually did the work. It gives me gratification to know that my employees are receiving these letters. That's not to say that three weeks from now I won't have to correct that employee. But your daily interaction with them shouldn't consist of correcting them; that's not what you're there for. A manager is there to manage and to guide.

The seminars that were held last year and the year previous at the Forman Center were very helpful. They were open to the entire College community, from administrators on down. We teamed up and discussed conflicts in the workplace and how to resolve conflicts. The instructors were excellent and were very understanding of the complexities of the College, of departmental territory issues.

UNIONS TOO POWERFUL?

pass tough health and safety laws, enforced by armies of inspectors, so that practically no one is being injured on the job anymore. Is that it?"

"Nope."

At this point, still struggling to figure out what they mean when they say unions are too powerful, I launch into a bit of labor history. "You mean, like when the workers demanded laws to get children out of the mines and the factories? You mean today's workers are powerful like that?" I ask.

This, usually, does not get a positive response, either, and I continue to fish for the answer.

"Maybe it's like the times when workers demanded a 40-hour week and went on strike all over the place to gain it, which is why you have the weekend off, is that it?"

"Uh, uh."

"I know now," I say, and maybe not quite so mellowly anymore. "It must be that you think every worker ought to have to go one-on-one against the boss. That would be a more equal balance of power wouldn't it? Workers shouldn't have the right to act collectively, should they? That's not really fair to the boss, is it? One worker, one corporation. That's only right, eh?"

Usually, by now, they begin to backtrack.

Darned Inconvenient

But, in the back of their minds, they are still thinking about the time the teachers went on strike, and they had to scramble to find someone to look after the kids during the day. Darned inconvenient. They might be remembering when the postal workers went on strike a few years ago, and they couldn't mail their aunt's birthday card. Annoying. And, oh yeah, they saw something on TV about that big General Motors strike not too long ago, and they even heard that their brother-in-law's neighbor didn't get his car on time. (So what if they hadn't had a single raise in a million years, and the government was firing about a third of them. They were always overpaid, anyway, weren't they?) Well, it was kind of touch-and-go there whether they'd get their passport renewed on time for that overseas holiday.

Unions! It's obvious. They're too damn powerful.

By George Ehring, Our Times, an independent labor magazine. Reprinted with permission. Web Site: www.ourtimes.web.net

It amazes me sometimes to hear people say they think unions have too much power. You hear it all the time, at least I do, even from ordinary working people. "What are they thinking?" I wonder. So I try to be polite, because I am getting older and grayer and I must be mellowing.

"Do you mean," I ask, "that the balance of power between workers and corporations or between workers and government, has become too strong?"

"Well, uh, I don't know," they say.

Weak Corporations

"You mean," I point out helpfully, "the corporations have become so weak that they've lost the power to fire their workers whenever they want, lay them off, or move their companies anywhere in the world where the labor or taxes are cheaper and there aren't too many pesky regulations?"

"Well, no, not exactly."

"You mean, then, that the workers have been able to force the bosses to pay them so much that they're practically earning as much as the boss, and that's not fair?" I ask.

"Uh, no."

"Then maybe it's that the workers have bargained for so much time off the job that the companies can hardly find anyone to keep the place going?"

"Not really."

"Is it because the workers have become so powerful that they can force the boss to pay women as much as they pay men? You have a problem with that?"

They are shaking their heads at this one.

Too Powerful?

"Wait," I say, "maybe it's that the workers have become so powerful that they can force the boss to hire minority workers, you know, immigrants. That's it, isn't it?"

This one is often met with an embarrassed silence.

I shift gears. "Maybe the workers have become so powerful that they've been able to force government to pass laws protecting their rights, is that it? No? Then, it must be that they have forced governments to pass laws making it really easy to organize new workplaces. No? Okay, maybe it's that they've made governments

LETTER

It's that time again! As many of you know, our current contract is set to expire June 30 of this year and PSA@RIC is in the process of preparing for negotiations. The Negotiations Committee has been assembled. The members of the team are as follows: George Aguiar, Miriam Boyajian, Arthur Patrie, Kathy Sasso, Rob Bower, Mike Mullane, and yours truly. As you can see from the list, we have some veterans from years past and one rookie that I know of—I am confident that we have a good team and we will work hard to bring you the best contract possible.

Here is a short re-cap of where we are at this point. A preliminary survey was distributed to the membership at the end of January. We tried a new approach of distribution—all division representatives were asked to hand-deliver the survey to those on their membership list. This method of delivery was something that had never been done before and the feedback has been very positive. Thank you to the division reps who took the time and effort to make this process a success!

After reviewing the preliminary surveys, a list of issues/concerns was compiled. The membership was then invited

Karen Rubino

FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT . . .

to an open session on February 13 where questions about the negotiations process were addressed as well as issues/ideas indicated on the surveys were presented. There was good attendance at the open session and some interesting issues were raised and added to the list.

You will see a second survey distributed very shortly where the membership will be asked to rank issues in order of importance. We hope to have the second survey in an electronic format which can be completed online and automatically e-mailed to Rob Bower. Once that process is complete, the results will be tallied. The negotiations team can then see what is important to the membership and on which issues to focus.

All in all, those of us on the Negotiations Committee hope for an expedient and productive process and a settlement that we will be proud to present to our members.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments do not hesitate to contact me, Rob, or any member of the committee.

I think it is a type of professional development that is needed on campus. We need to understand every employee's needs, not just those on the high end, but all the way down the ladder. We had one role play where the supervisor was very demanding, saying things had to be a certain way and giving no reason for it. Usually employees would like to know the reason. They may not like the reason but they would like it explained to them.

Lack of communication has killed many armies. Many countries, many democracies, have gone down in flames because of lack of communication and respect. When an employee is called in for something they did wrong—maybe not intentional—but it caused a slow down, damage, loss, or something of that nature, the supervisor should ask the employee if there was a reason why this occurred and what can be done to prevent this in the future. Whatever the response, it needs to be a constructive one.

We need to learn to speak the truth in ways

that are not threatening to others, that others can easily hear.

The supervisor should never go in pounding the employee. No one wants to work under the thought of a threat every time they make a mistake. Once the employee gives an explanation, the supervisor needs to say, "Okay, let's not let it happen again," and then drop it. Once is enough. Employees are adults. They understand. And you'll gain respect from that. Don't spend an entire meeting restating what's already been said. It's done. It's over with. If you hammer them with it, you'll just make a possibly good employee go bad. That's called driving someone into the ground. All you're going to do is possibly ruin a good employee who needed some correction. It's very easy to terminate an employee, very easy to disregard an employee, but very difficult to turn a troubled employee into a good employee. That's the challenge. The easy way out is just to call, "Next!"

There's a difference between expressing yourself

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and using your words to control others.

Sometimes the only way you can determine whether you're trying to control someone else or whether you're simply expressing your feelings is by noticing how many times you say the same thing. If you mention something that is on your mind and then let it go no matter what the response you get, you are speaking sincerely. If you repeatedly make similar suggestions or ask prodding questions again and again, you are probably trying to control.

You can harp on the error the employee made over and over again and instead of engendering humility in the employee, you bring them to a level of humiliation. The worst thing you can have on the job is hostility. Hostility in the workplace brings down productivity and morale. And the ways things are today, you can't afford to have nonproductive days. Every day has to be a productive day. If you have an employee coming to you to apologize, trying to diffuse a difficult situation, you have a good employee; that one should be nurtured.

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Ultimately a good supervisor understands that the employee makes him and he makes the employee. The supervisor can only be as good as the employees that work for him and the employees can only be as good as their supervisor. Everyone—from the administrator, to the president, to the CEO, down to the lowest category part-time employee—all have to be rowing in the same direction. The best supervisors keep their employees in the circle.

Those who listen tend to be more

respected than those who correct.

ISSUES PSA@RIC MEMBERS WOULD LIKE TO SEE ON THE TABLE DURING NEGOTIATIONS

SALARY AND PAY GRADE ISSUES

1. Appeal process (PAC) should be a resource for salary issues not grade related.
2. Fix pay grades.
3. Rewrite upgrade language to allow motions when agreeable to both sides.
4. Improve time/response.
5. Avoid pay cut.
6. Provide a mechanism for movement within grade.
7. Parity of raises with faculty.
8. Phased in raises considering state of the state.

LEAVE ISSUES

1. Increase hours of annual leave and personal days to five based on years of service.
2. Appeal process on lost annual leave.
3. Sick leave issues.
4. In crease bereavement leave from three to five days.
5. Comp time/over time/pay.
6. Ability to sell back comp time and to receive payment for holiday hours worked.
7. Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve should be paid holidays.
8. Family medical leave issues.

HEALTH PACKAGE

1. Long-term care added to health package.
2. Free health club membership or Recreation Center membership.
3. Thirty-year benefits.
4. Health insurance:
 - How many of our members use the waiver? Waive the waiver to save state dollars.
 - Keep copays consistent within contract.

- Keep contributions as low as possible.
- Should be equal to faculty package.
- Preserve and protect even if fee.

HIRING

1. Inconsistencies in posting of positions.
2. Job description on file for all.
3. Recall procedures/job description.
4. PSA consideration for open positions.

MERIT PAY

1. Eliminate merit pay structure.
2. Add mechanism to review supervisor's performance.
3. Eliminate inequities.
 - Must be refined if continued.
 - Time lines strengthened.
 - Eliminate performance-based objectives.
 - Increase amount.
 - Use merit money for professional development.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. No contract, no work!
2. Additional longevity at five and fifteen years.
3. Evaluation process (PSA/union representative present).
4. Tuition waivers retained through master's level.
5. Clean work environments.
6. Henry Barnard School enrollment (same preference given to PSA members' children as faculty's children)

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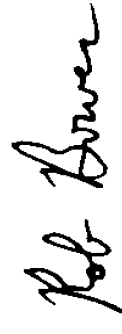
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LETTER

FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .



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