

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak
COLUMNIST (www.AdviceChief.com)

You’re a young twenties or thirties manager supervising people in their forties and fifties or older. You’ve attended leadership and management seminars to learn some supervisory skills. You have a master’s degree in your field and have proven yourself to be a stellar performer. You truly are the most capable person to be the boss. Yet, despite all this, your older subordinates are not impressed with you or your record. They resent having to listen to you because in their mind, you’re still “wet behind the ears.” So how do you successfully lead them and manage their activities?

First, be nice and easy on your approach toward them in various situations. This helps them think you are mature beyond your years. They don’t like young whipper snappers getting carried away with chaotic leadership styles. The more times you remain calm with a friendly demeanor in situations you deal with or plan for, the more likely

How to supervise people much older than yourself

it becomes a fact in their mind that you are, indeed, mature beyond your years.

Second, take time making changes. Be very deliberate about it. Don’t throw your weight around by decisions left and right, or too quickly. Many older employees will view quick decisions as being impulsive (even though they might not always think the same thing if done by an older manager). Quick action by an older manager gives him the adjective “decisive.” The same action by a young manager earns him the adjective “reckless.” It’s not fair but that’s the way it is. You simply need to give older employees some time to get used to you being there.

Third, you don’t have to know the answer to every question brought to you. Faking an answer when you don’t know it is a mistake, and the experienced employee sees through it instantly. If you can’t answer a question, be honest about it and let the person know you will find out and get back to them. This candor avoids the image of the know-it-all kid.

Lastly, demonstrate early on and often that, like all good managers, you are concerned about the well-being of every person reporting to you. Like leadership expert John Maxwell reiterates over and over: People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. When your older employees feel you truly care about them and take their livelihood into consideration when making decisions, they will respond and support you in a more positive way.

Leading older-generation workers is very challenging but it can be extremely valuable when done appropriately. Your most experienced and wisest people, when utilized effectively, can be your best asset when planning for scenarios where danger looms or obstacles are abundant.

So don’t hesitate to seek counsel from your older and wiser employees. Make it known to them that they are important. Let them shine and you and your team will be unstoppable.

~ The End ~