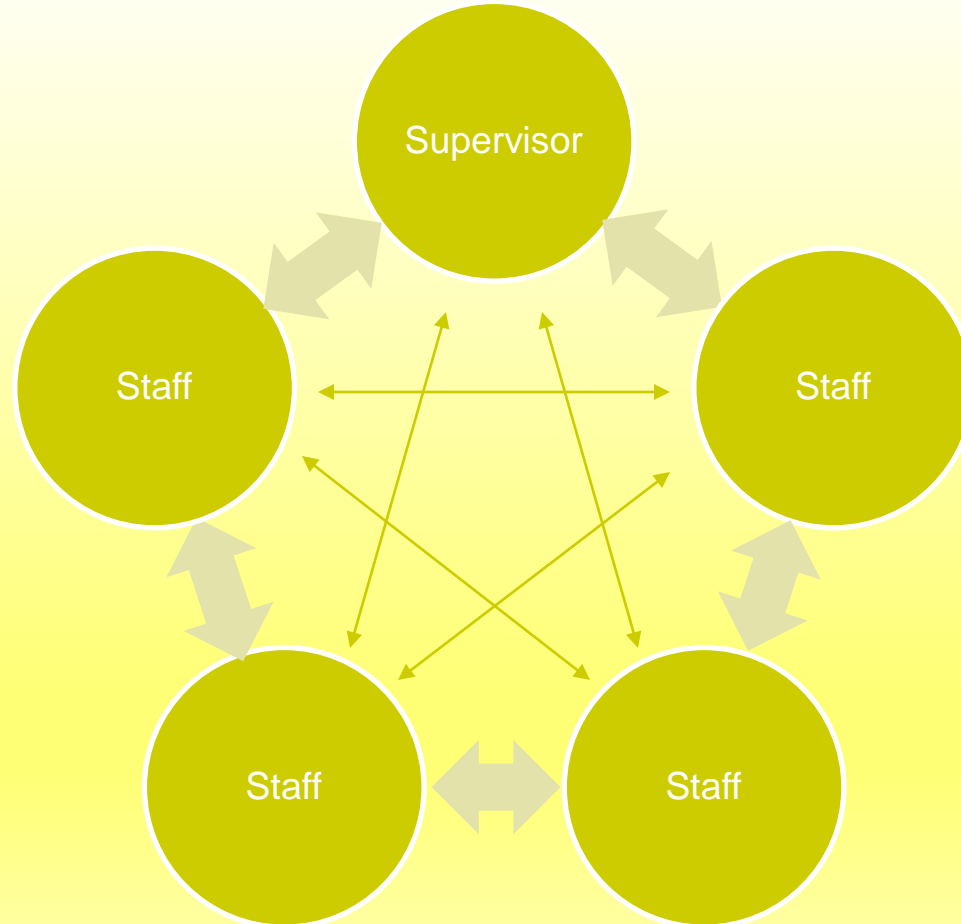


Supervision of Work Group Dynamics





Workshop Goals

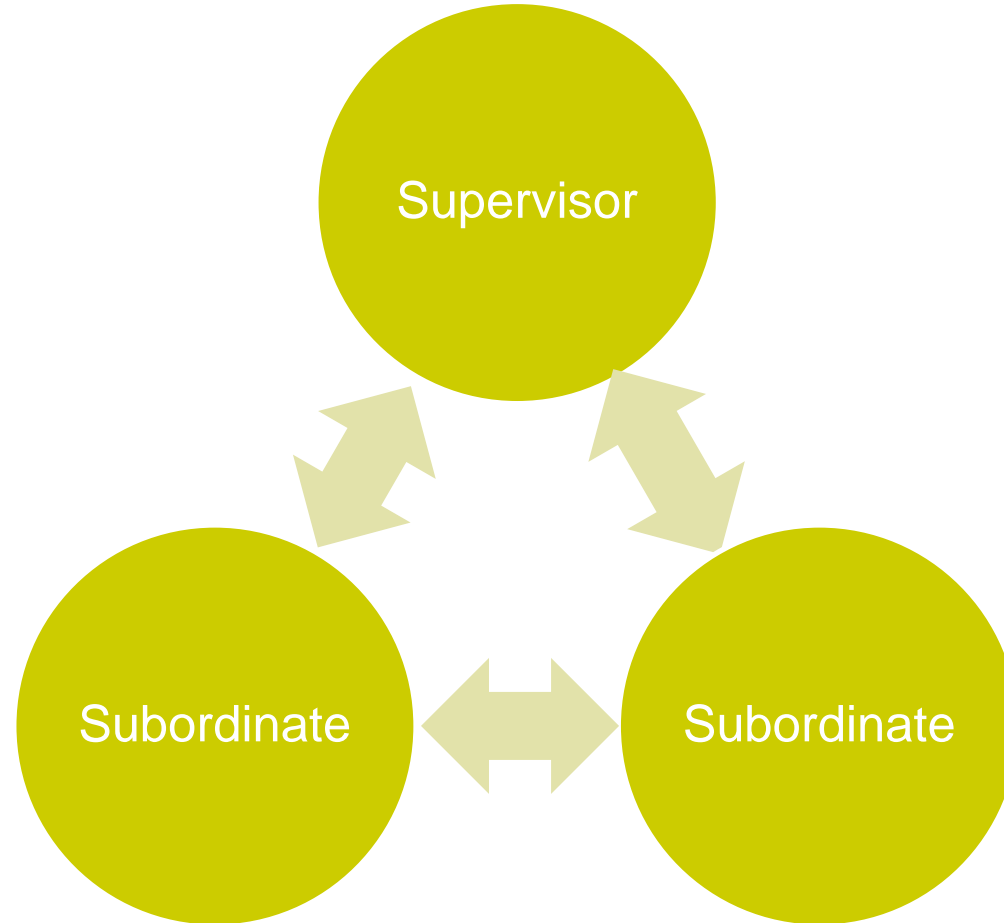
- To examine how the dynamics of workgroups, an oft ignored area of supervision/management, can impact both productivity and employee well being
- To present a framework for identifying productivity inhibiting workgroup dynamics
- Discuss how the unit supervisor can intervene and shape workplace norms which foster productivity

Why a Group?

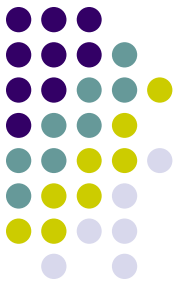


- Much of the study of supervision and supervisory skills is focused on individual supervision (i.e., the supervisor-supervisee dyad)
- A group is the relationships developed among an aggregation of 3 or more people working together
- The dynamics of those group relationships have a tremendous impact on workplace productivity, individual worker motivation and general employee well being

Triad: The Smallest Group Unit



Work Group Issues Impacting Productivity and Well Being

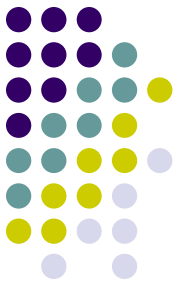


- Subgrouping / Alliances / Triangulation – (Power and Authority Distortion)
- Aggression/Bullying/Harassment behaviors – (Emotional Regulation and Safety)
- Free Riding / Loafing - (Resentment and Reduced Productivity)

Work units and organizations are information processing systems



Effective information processing in a work unit



- Emotional regulation and interpersonal engagement is essential to group (i.e., work unit) information processing
- Hyper-arousal due to threats (either real or imagined) interferes with information processing due our brain's negative bias
- What are some real and/or imagined threats in the workplace?

Emotional Regulation / Threat Management



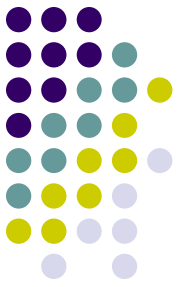
The Triune Brain



- **Neocortex** - Thought (including planning, language, logic & will, awareness)
- **Limbic System** - Emotion (feelings, relationship/nurturing, images and dreams, play)
- **Reptilian Brain** - Instinct (survival, breathing/swallowing/heartbeat, startle response)

**Three Brains in
One**

Cialdini's Social Validation Principle



People frequently ignore or severely underestimate the extent to which their actions in a situation are determined by the similar actions of others



Socially Determined Behavior Often Will Short Circuit Critical Thinking



Influence Principle of Liking



- People are influenced by people they believe are “like” them. That is, if person A identifies with person B, B will be able to influence A
- In a work unit, there will be limits to the teamwork capacity of employees who do not like each other or see their co-workers as “different”

I Have a Best Friend at Work



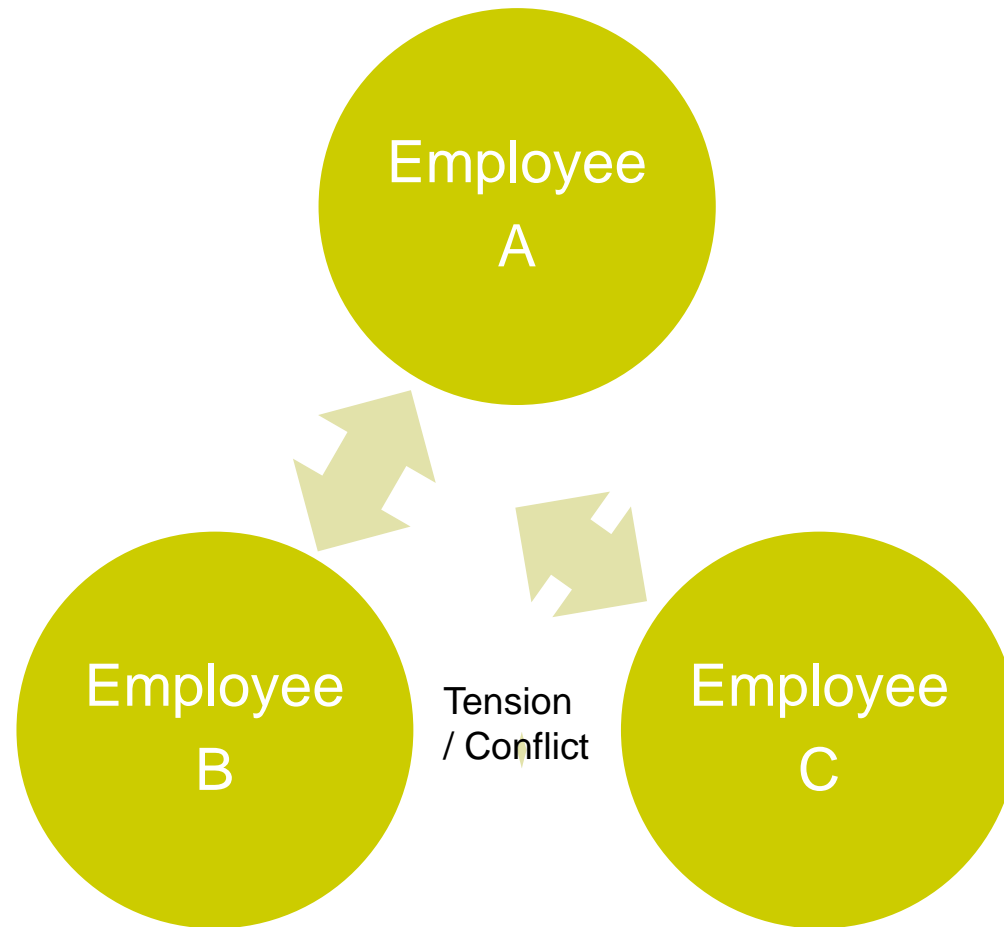
- According to Gallup, the statement above is one of the best indicators of both employee engagement and workgroup productivity
- Women who strongly agree they have a best friend at work are more than twice as likely to be engaged (63%) compared with the women who say otherwise (29%).

If We Are Heavily Influenced By the Actions of Those Around Us . . .



- Since supervisors and/or managers spend a relatively small amount of their work time directly interacting with staff, most of their cues for expected workplace behavior (i.e., norms) come from co-workers
- Hence, effective workplace norms are critical to a healthy and productive work unit
- Engaged relationships with supportive co-workers is also vital to success

Triangulation

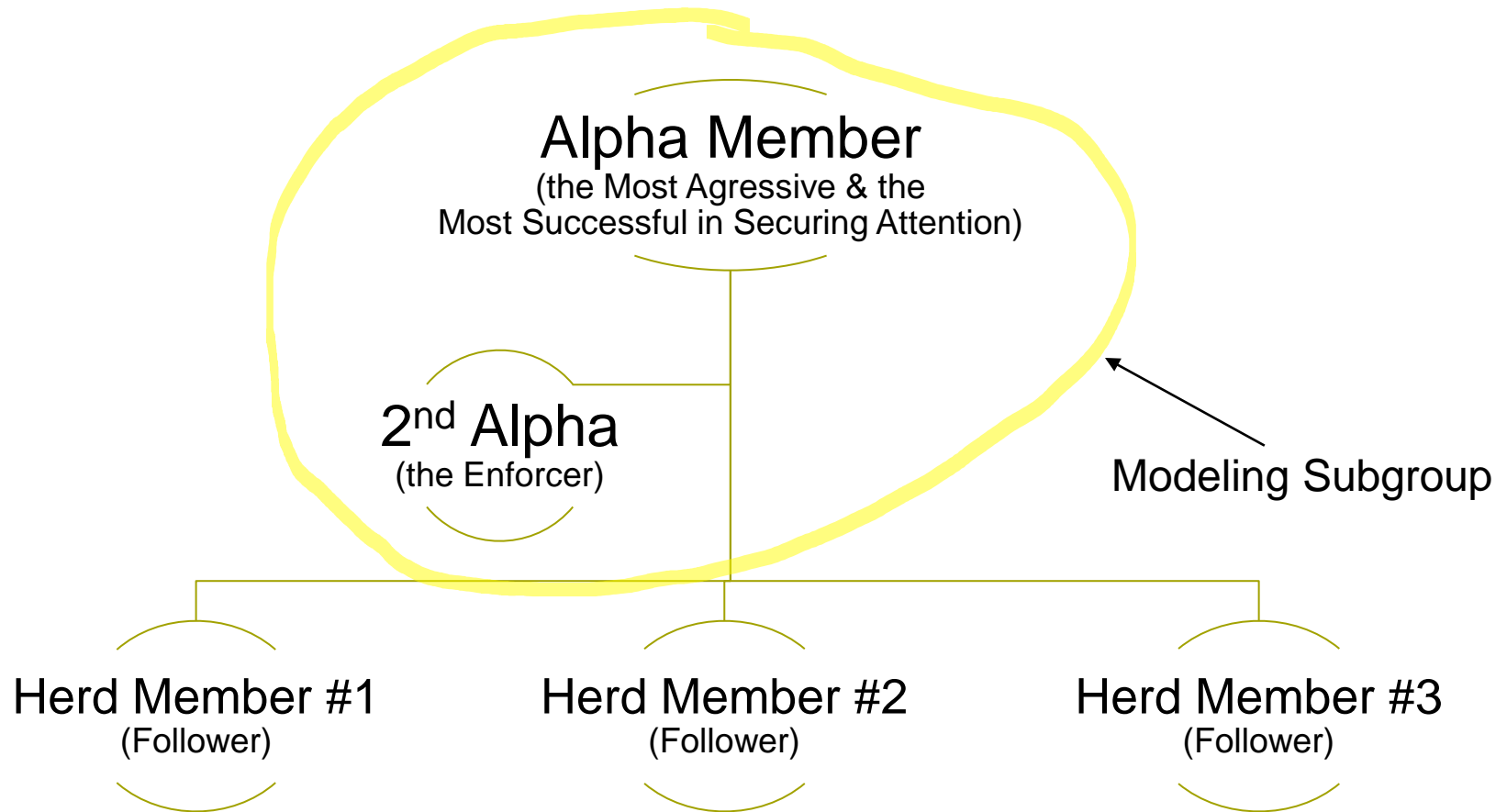
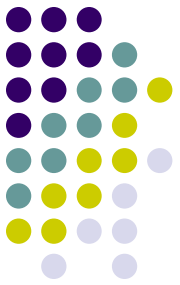


Triangles



- Triangulation is a normal way of relieving anxiety that develops in a primary relationship, and as such is not problematic
- Triangulation becomes a problem when it is the primary way (pattern) of dealing with anxiety in a relationship
- Not only do the two people refrain from communicating / cooperating with each other, the subgroup that is formed poses a distorted power center in the work unit

Herd Structure



Herd Management



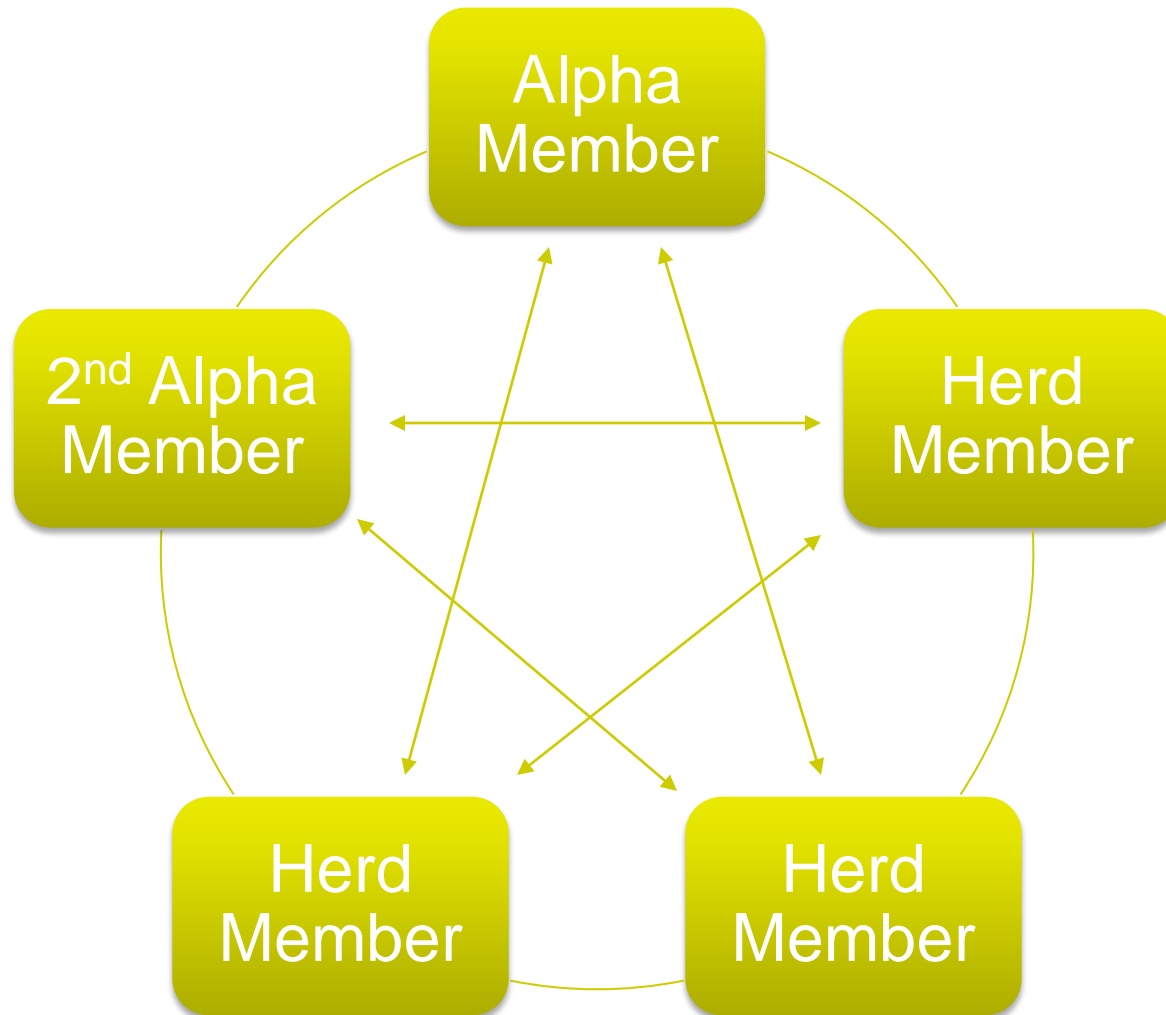
- When there are problems in a staff group, line staff see the problems long before the supervisor does, however:
- If staff are in the alpha subgroup (i.e. in power) addressing any problems their group dominance engenders will erode their power, and
- If staff are in the follower's subgroup, attempting to resist the will of the alphas often leads to punishment (typically exclusion)

Herd Management



- The supervisor or manager is the only one with sufficient authority and power to intervene and alter the interactional norms of emergent herd behavior
- To effectively influence staff groups towards the creation of maximally productive and healthy norms, a supervisor needs to:
 - 1) pay attention to staff interactions, and
 - 2) intervene quickly when problematic interaction patterns develop

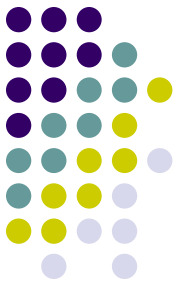
Effective Group Management Requires Alteration of the Herd Structure



Supervisory Triangulation



- How does the supervisee handle interpersonal conflict with you as a supervisor?
- Does he/she talk to you about concerns and resolve differences one on one? or
- Does the supervisee avoid conflict / disagreement with you in dyadic interactions, but attempt to gain allies for his/her viewpoint with others (i.e. triangulation)?



Staff Triangulation

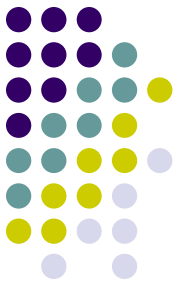
- How do workers handle interpersonal conflict with their co-workers?
- Do they talk to each other directly, or do they complain or gossip about each other?
- Triangulation among staff is interrupted when the supervisor structures a parley between the conflicting parties without the ally present

Aggression / Bullying / Harassment



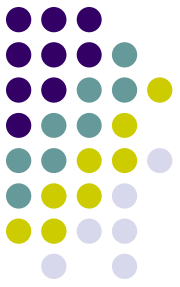
- When these behaviors are ignored or ineffectively curtailed, a work unit norm of acceptance of hostility develops
- Co-workers are often reluctant to intervene for fear of themselves becoming the object of aggression
- The supervisor or manager, by virtue of their legitimate power and authority, can safely and effectively set limits on aggressive behavior

Aggression / Bullying / Harassment



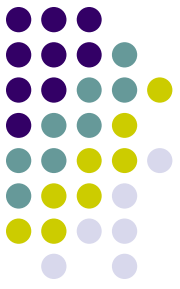
- Staff members are adults and being an adult means taking responsibility for emotional regulation
- People experience negative emotions in the workplace such as anger, resentment, jealousy, etc. and appropriate expression of these emotions (preferably using “I” statements / language) is quite useful
- However, outbursts which suggest the person is not in control of their emotions are often frightening and productivity inhibiting for co-workers

Aggression / Bullying / Harassment

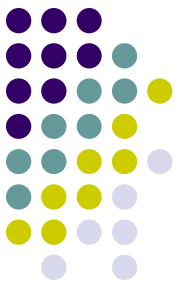


- Many people are resistant to limiting their emotional outbursts or hostile behavior, but most employees will reluctantly comply with limits set by their supervisor or manager
- A private discussion that sends the message, “Raising your voice and shouting angrily at a co-worker is not acceptable workplace behavior. How will you handle things differently when you become angry with a co-worker?”
- Or alternately, “Sexual banter, regardless of whether it is welcomed or unwelcomed, will not be tolerated in this work environment. Failure to comply with this limit will result in your termination.”

Liking a Supervisee is Preferable to Disliking, but . . .



- As supervisors, we often think the employees we like the best deserve the most rewards and are the best performers
- In fact, supervisory liking can frequently lead to employee loafing, because the employee:
 - 1) Believes they will get pay raises and other rewards regardless of their performance, and
 - 2) Expects there to be no consequences for non-productive behavior (they will be excused from any responsibility for their actions)



Free Riding / Loafing

- To ensure some sense of esprit de corps and maintain employee motivation, free riding or loafing by unit employees must be addressed
- Employees who get away with less productivity, less responsibility or lesser behavior standards engender resentment from co-workers and ultimately reduce co-worker motivation

Three Guidelines for Fostering Healthy Workplace Norms



1. Pay attention to and observe the interactions and subgroupings that develop in the work unit
2. Deliver direct and clear statements of limits from the supervisor to employee(s) regarding expected behavior(s)
3. Limit setting delivered sooner rather than later to avoid the development of problematic norms