Employees sometimes come to me with complaints about difficult coworkers, but too often it is late in the game, when the relationships have deteriorated. How can I encourage employees to deal with their issues sooner?

Most problem relationships grow difficult because coworkers fail to sit down and hammer out differences early on. Here’s a prevention strategy:

1) Have more frequent contact with your employees in a group setting where you can model appropriate communication, set a tone for cooperation, and allow employees to see you interacting with their peers. Over time, your style will establish a nonverbal, almost unconscious standard of communication that employees will emulate. 2) Have more one-on-one interactions with employees so you learn about emerging conflicts and can offer guidance sooner. 3) Increase employees’ motivation to address their issues sooner. Disavow the “fix-it” role. Instead, explain that when interpersonal conflicts arise, the conflicts will not be dissected in order to establish who’s to blame. Instead, conflicts will be resolved in the most expedient manner, and both parties could find that solution undesirable. Have your employees complete the “Basics of Effective Communication” Skill Builder online at www.MyIMPACTSolution.com to help them brush up on skills needed for healthy workplace relationships.

Sexual harassment is not a problem when behavior in the workplace between the sexes is pleasant and friendly, and contrary to misinformation, even mildly flirtatious interactions are not sexual harassment as long as no reasonable person is offended. Still, you should express your discomfort with the frequency of this behavior or the degree to which it appears. Be specific when you speak with your employee. You’re in charge, so it’s your job to decide when to step in. Most employees will respond cooperatively and favorably to such informal “counseling” sessions. Communication is everything. You can't go wrong by being proactive, reminding all employees about the sexual harassment policy periodically, and personally mentioning your strong disapproval of sexual harassment. Employees will take their cues from the tone and expectations you set for the workplace. Have your employees complete the Skill Builder “Preventing Sexual Harassment (For Employees)” online at www.MyIMPACTSolution.com as a reminder of appropriate behavior in the workplace.

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Most people know that micromanagement defines behavior associated with difficulty in delegating work, but this is only part of the story. Micromanagement occurs when supervisors become overly obsessed with the extreme details of the job and thereby overly controlling of the work of subordinates. Coaching by another supervisor who knows how to delegate and how to spot micromanagement behaviors is a crucial step in your plan for change. Contacting the EAP is also strongly recommended so you can address resistance to change that you will experience, insecurity in your role, organizational culture issues that contribute to the pressure you face to control work, concern over the stability of your position, anger at others when they make decisions without your approval, and other factors that may influence the pressure you feel to micromanage. Read the article “Delegating to Whittle Down Your To-Do List” online at www.MyIMPACTSolution.com to begin exploring what a change in behavior may look like for you.

Mobbing is a form of bullying. It is used in the literature to describe a group of employees bullying another employee, as opposed to bullying perpetrated by a single employee. Supervisory personnel may be unaware of mobbing because employee behavior is often covert. An aggressive form of mobbing would include a group of employees who target an employee by using rumor, innuendo, intimidation, and isolation in order to force that person to resign. Mobbing can impose significant psychological stress on victims, with consequential problems of low productivity, depression, and emotional stress. If you identify mobbing behavior in the workplace, act to end it immediately, refer victims to the EAP for support, and incorporate the EAP in any plan that includes corrective action for perpetrators. Consult with your HR or IMPACT Representative about the tools available to you to address this behavior.