Guide to Interpersonal Skills

207.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE
This document provides guidance for supervisory personnel and members to develop interpersonal skills. This guide is not designed to provide strict rules; rather, it is meant to be a tool for developing positive communication between members when not operating on emergency scenes.

Corresponding Policies:

Conduct and Behavior

Performance Evaluations

Personnel Complaints

Post-Incident Analysis

207.2 SETTING INTERPERSONAL VALUES
- Interpersonal values should demonstrate the member's commitment to functional relationships in the workplace:
  - ᵒ Between supervisors and subordinates.
  - ᵒ Between those equal in rank.
  - ᵒ Between the member and the public.
  - ᵒ Between the member and other municipal employees.
- Practice and application of interpersonal values should:
  - ᵒ Be consistently applied.
  - ᵒ Improve workplace culture.
  - ᵒ Build trust.
  - ᵒ Build respect.
  - ᵒ Minimize conflict.
  - ᵒ Demonstrate leadership.
  - ᵒ Improve member performance.
  - ᵒ Build an attitude of teamwork.
  - ᵒ Reduce risk in the fire station and on the fireground.

207.3 INTERPERSONAL VALUES

207.3.1 BE TRANSPARENT

Supervisors should be honest and open with their crews or subordinate officers and share non-confidential information about the Department and department issues that affect the members.

Encourage crews and subordinate officers to be honest and open in their discussions with fellow members and superiors.

Encourage two-way communication. Supervisors should encourage feedback from crews and subordinates on administrative decisions. On-scene feedback concerning tactical and strategic decisions should be limited to critical safety issues. This can be done while maintaining chain of command and discipline.

207.3.2 COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Communicate orders and directives calmly, clearly, and firmly.

- In non-emergent situations that don't involve personnel matters, let members know why you are taking a certain course of action. During Post-Incident Analysis (PIA), explain your reasoning for orders given on-scene.

- Make constructive feedback part of all conversations.

- Discuss and deliver discipline in a direct and respectful manner, emphasizing behaviors that need to change. The basis of discipline discussions should be specific to relevant policies and procedures.

- Make giving credit to others a regular practice.

- Practice self-evaluation and disclosure with members to encourage open discussion.

- Ask for help from superiors, equals, and subordinates when you need it. Making verbal or written requests for help encourages trust and more open communication.

BODY LANGUAGE/NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

All members, not just supervisors, should be aware of the power and impact of their nonverbal communication and how to read other members' nonverbal communications.

Examples of nonverbal communications and the positive or negative impact include but are not limited to:

- Eye contact
  - For the speaker, maintaining eye contact conveys honesty and confidence.
  - For the listener, maintaining eye contact shows active listening and interest in what is being said. It indicates the speaker's statements are respected and will be considered.

- Posture and body movements

- o   For both the speaker and the listener, sitting or standing straight and square-shouldered, facing each other, encourages discussion. Leaning in indicates the importance of a point that is being made or heard.

- o   Avoid playing with office items like rubber bands, pens and pencils, and paper clips.

- o   Cell phones should be silenced and put away.

- o   During conversations, members should remain aware that movements or expressions such as nodding or shaking the head, smiling, frowning, or expressing concern can convey active listening, agreement, disagreement, or empathy.

- Gestures and hand movements can emphasize a point or indicate acceptance or rejection of an idea.

207.3.3   ACTIVELY LISTEN

Supervisors can demonstrate active listening when they:

- Pay attention.

- Use constant eye contact.

- Demonstrate listening through verbal and nonverbal recognition.

- Give feedback. Be open, honest, and respectful.

- Allow other people to finish their thoughts before asking.

- Repeat back to the speaker important points that need clarification or to show full understanding.

- Demonstrate empathy through the use of active listening techniques.

207.3.4   SET EXPECTATIONS

Supervisors should ensure their assigned members understand expectations by:

- Emphasizing that understanding and adhering to department policies and procedures is expected of all members.

- o   Encourage members to ask for clarification if they do not fully understand the use or context of a department policy or procedure.

- o   Not understanding is not an excuse for not following a given policy or procedure.

- Following department policies and procedures and setting the example for other members.

- Any additional expectations should be:

- o   Clearly communicated.

- o   Put in writing and shared with members.

- o   Continually emphasized.

207.3.5   MANAGE WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Supervisors should recognize when workplace conflicts arise between members. Potential causes of workplace conflict include but are not limited to:

- Poor communication.

- Decisions, orders, or directives that are communicated weakly, incompletely, or ambiguously.

- Lack of tolerance of cultural, social, political, or personal differences between members.

- Personal stress.

- Improper use of authority.

- Subjective treatment of members that creates a sense of unfair treatment.

- Personal on-duty or off-duty behaviors that other members find objectionable, or that may negatively impact the department.

Supervisors should address workplace conflicts as soon as they are seen or reported, and before a conflict interferes with department operations and order. Methods of addressing and resolving workplace conflicts include but are not limited to:

- Determining if the conflict is addressed by a department policy or procedure and discussing it with the involved members. Discussion should include:
  - Review of the policy or procedure.
  - Discussion of the policy or procedure.
  - Having an open-ended discussion to ensure that the members understand the policy or procedure.
  - Emphasizing that the policy or procedure will be enforced fairly for all members.
  - Seeking agreement with the involved members that enforcement of the policy or procedure will resolve the conflict.

- If the workplace conflict is being caused by personal issues, supervisors should determine whether a meeting with the members to talk out the issue and reach understanding will resolve the conflict without negatively impacting the efficient and effective operations of the Department.

- If the conflict is based on department operations and practices, supervisors should hold open-ended discussions with the involved members to encourage respect and appreciation for how individuals approach their job. Seek resolution through applicable policies or procedures and always keep an open mind that a member may have a better approach that may influence changes in policy or procedure.

- Where necessary, discipline for violation of policy or procedure may have to be imposed if the conflict cannot be resolved through discussion. See the Personnel Complaints Policy.

Nothing in this procedure limits or prohibits members from making complaints pursuant to the Discriminatory Harassment Policy, nor does any content in this procedure limit a supervisor from taking a workplace incident or situation up through the chain of command if necessary and appropriate.

207.4 RECORD-KEEPING AND DOCUMENTATION

For all activity discussed in this guide, members should complete any documentation or record-keeping required by corresponding policies or procedures.

207.5 CORRESPONDING PROCEDURES

Administrative Investigations and Interviews

Personnel Evaluations