

FROM FRIEND TO SUPERVISOR – CAN WE STILL BE FRIENDS?

My best friend and I had worked side by side in this department until a few months ago when I was promoted to supervisor. At first, she seemed very happy for me and nothing changed between us. Then she got really upset when I didn't implement her idea for a new procedure. She said that since I've become supervisor I don't care about her as my friend. Now I sometimes feel torn between our friendship and doing what I think is right for the department. Can I be both supervisor and friend?

Although you might like to think that nothing had to change with your co-worker/friend with your promotion, in reality a lot changed. You're no longer a co-worker as your new position brings with it different authority and responsibilities that set you apart. Add a special friendship to the mix and you can expect even greater changes, as well as misunderstandings and hurt feelings. While your friendship doesn't have to end, you and your friend need to re-define your relationship with regard to work using the following boundaries:

Differentiate between "friendly" and "friendship" at work. You can be friendly with those you supervise, but friendships have to stop at the workplace door. It's important to treat all workers the same and friendship behavior may give others the *perception* that she's getting special treatment even if she isn't. This may mean no more personal lunches, or sharing "inside" jokes, or special birthday gifts at work.

Don't let your friendship influence your supervisory decisions. Your first obligation is to your organization and to everyone you supervise, and your decisions need to reflect that. When you want input, make sure to seek it from everyone you supervise and to give all input fair consideration.

Communication about work must be as her supervisor. You can't vent to your friend about others in the organization or about your frustrations with other aspects of the organization. You have a responsibility to help her do the best job she can which includes promoting a positive attitude about the organization and the people in it. As a supervisor, you also have information you cannot share with other employees, so even if your friend can keep a secret, she can no longer be your confidant with regard to work-related information.

Through honest dialogue that gives careful consideration to your roles at work, you can choose to have a friendship and a positive workplace relationship that benefits both of you as well as the organization.