

Low-Key Strategy: Train Managers to Handle Basic Employee Relations





If your managers freeze the moment someone says, “Can we talk?”, it’s time to start training them on basic employee relations. Not with a 3-day seminar or legal jargon, but with practical tools they can actually use when things get weird.

Most managers want to do the right thing. They just don’t always know how. And if you wait until there’s a full-blown complaint to coach them? You’re already too late. That’s why building lightweight, easy-to-follow manager toolkits is such a game-changer. It gives them the confidence to handle small issues early, before they turn into HR problems.

IReal talk: Managers don’t need to be HR. They just need a roadmap

They need to know:

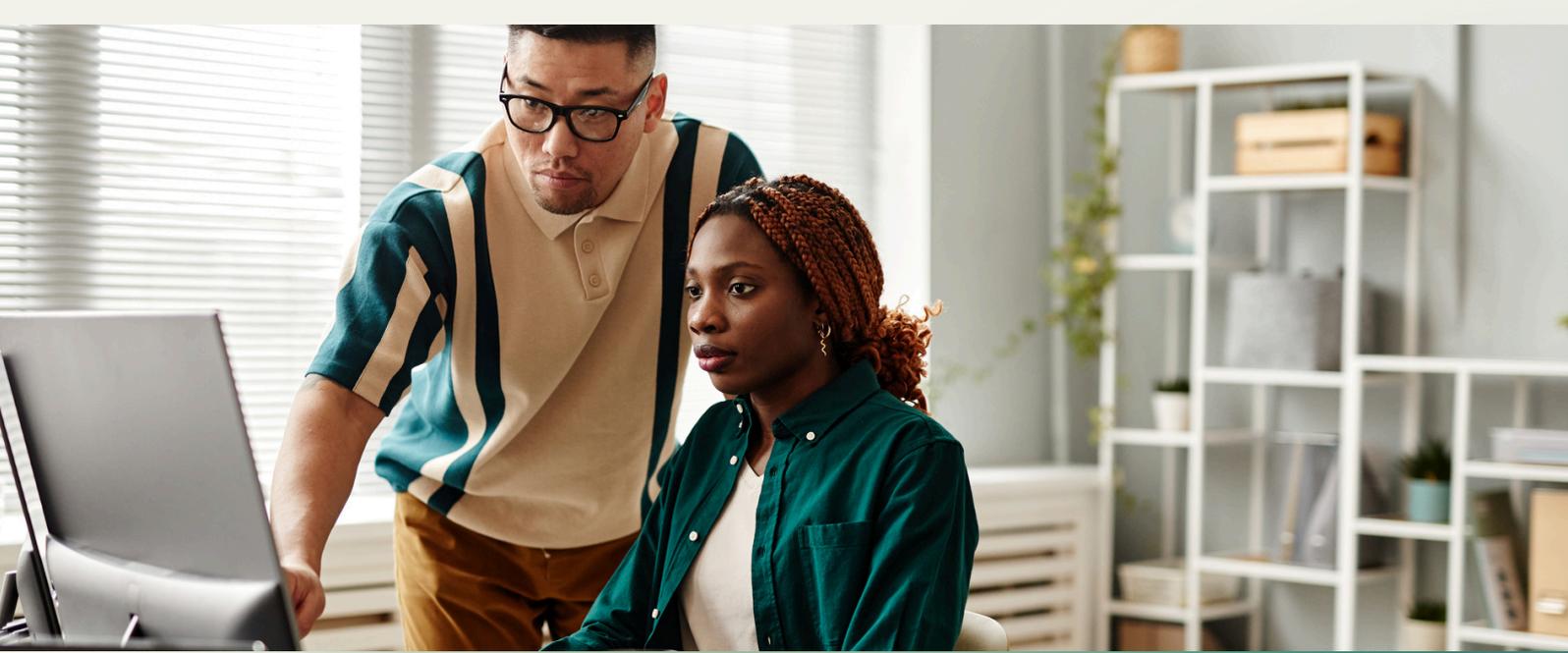
- How to document a conversation without sounding robotic
- What to say (and not say) when someone brings up a sensitive concern
- When to loop in HR
- How to keep things confidential - but not secret
- How to set clear expectations and follow through



Give them that, and suddenly, they're not panicking every time someone calls in sick three Mondays in a row or hints that a teammate is being "passive-aggressive again."

Easy places to start:

- A simple one-pager on how to address performance or behavior concerns
- Sample scripts for tough conversations
- A checklist for documenting issues (even informal ones)
- A decision tree for when to escalate to HR



This doesn't just support your managers, it protects your company. You can't be in every meeting. But if you empower your managers to handle small stuff well, you'll spend way less time on big messes later.

Real story: I once worked with a nonprofit where one manager had eight low-key employee issues brewing, missed deadlines, awkward comments, poor communication, and hadn't addressed any of them because she "didn't want to say the wrong thing." We gave her a basic conversation script and a template for notes. Within two weeks, she'd had all eight conversations, resolved six, and flagged the other two for real HR follow-up. No formal write-ups. Just good, proactive people management.

Bottom line: Managers are your frontline in employee relations, whether they feel ready or not. Give them the tools before they need them, and you'll avoid way more drama, confusion, and burnout across the board.

Quick gut check: Do your managers know what to do when someone brings them a concern, or are they quietly hoping it never happens?