

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: **How to Go from a Peer to Boss**



In today's economy, reorganizations in park and recreation agencies are becoming all too common. You may find yourself suddenly overseeing employees who were once at the same level as you. While transitioning into a supervisory role can be exciting -- and possibly signal a new phase in your career -- it also means a shift in dynamics with colleagues, especially those who will now be reporting to you.

Your success taking on a leadership role is dependent on building positive working relationships with direct reports, and being able to exercise authority when necessary. Following are some steps to help make the switch from peer to park and recreation manager as smooth as possible:

Meet with your team

One of the first items on your agenda should be to meet with those you will oversee. Arrange one-on-one conversations to make sure everyone understands the following:

- His or her role in the department, including exact responsibilities. These may have shifted due to recent staff changes or focus areas for the firm.
- What your expectations are and how they may differ from a previous manager's. For example, you may ask a park laborer to provide you with a daily work report. Or you may request an experienced recreation leader of your team to begin taking on more tasks.
- How accountability will be measured. These meetings also will allow you to better understand your team member's personal and professional goals, and what you can do to help them reach their objectives. In addition, give employees a chance to voice any questions or concerns they have about the change in management so you can work together to solve issues before they become problems.

Set boundaries

Understanding the everyday responsibilities of your new position is the easy part; the subtleties of your role are often harder to gauge. For example, is it appropriate for you to go out with the team after work? Are you allowed to joke with colleagues like you've done in the past?

Although there are no standard answers for questions like these, one thing is clear: You'll need to set new boundaries as a supervisor.

For instance, in your previous role, you may have confided in co-workers when you were frustrated with management decisions. But now that you are a member of management, you must set the example. This means using discretion, and offering support and guidance, not complaints, however harmless they may seem.

Don't play favorites

You may be closer friends with some co-workers than others, but as everyone's boss, you must treat each staff member with the same respect and concern. Giving choice assignments to only certain individuals, for instance, hints at favoritism. More important, paying special attention to a select few could cause you to overlook other talented team members. Also, your responsibility as a manager is to ensure every employee is a productive contributor to the park and recreation agency, so delegate projects fairly and ensure each person's workload is reasonable.

Be firm when necessary

Despite your best efforts, some employees may test your authority by ignoring directives, missing deadlines or being perpetually late to work for meetings. Take a steadfast approach when handling these situations. Each person on your team should already be aware of your expectations, and performance issues should be addressed and documented. It may be tempting to relax the rules, especially for people you've worked with for many years, but doing so will only encourage the type of behavior you're trying to quell.

Seek guidance

No matter how challenging your job as a supervisor may seem, you are not the first person to be faced with these issues. In fact, there are likely many individuals within the park and recreation department who have also had to navigate new relationships with co-workers after moving into management roles. Speak to them about the steps they took to overcome obstacles to success.

Becoming a manager is often the first step on your path to career advancement. Don't let a poorly executed transition derail your progress. By communicating openly and often with your team, setting boundaries and seeking guidance from others who have been there before, you'll ensure your move from peer to boss is smooth sailing.