



Dear Joe:

It was brought to my attention that some sensitive information about an employee may have been leaked. Through our investigation of the incident, we've determined that we have a bit of a "he said, she said" problem. Stories aren't adding up and fingers are being pointed among employees. It's really getting out of hand, as employees no longer trust one another and our teamwork is suffering. What should I do?

Sincerely, Finger Pointing

Dear Finger Pointing,

This situation is difficult and has the potential to get a lot worse. The first order of business is to restore trust and then attempt to unify the team. If the investigation revealed no wrongdoing, it might be helpful to meet individually with each employee to relay that information. Misunderstandings happen all of the time among people and since no one was terminated as an outcome of the investigation, I assume that is what we have here. During these one-on-one discussions, ask people what it will take for them to be trusting of their colleagues. As you collect this information from each person, ask each if they would be willing to share their answer with their teammates and encourage them to do so. Additionally, set the expectation as the leader that the best way to be trusted by others is to be trustworthy. In this case that means not gossiping about others and working in the best interest of your colleagues by putting their needs equal to or above your own.

Once you have met with each person individually, hold a team meeting to specifically address the issue. Ask people to share their needs in order to regain trust. You should share yours as well. Ask each team member to honor the request of his or her colleagues and try to meet those needs. Reiterate the importance for all of you to put this issue behind you and work toward coming together.

This series of meetings can be cathartic and begin the healing process. As you go forward, be sensitive to everyone's concerns and needs and do your best to facilitate a sense of unity. Look for opportunities to have people work closely together on projects. Have team breakfasts or lunches on occasion to get people together socially.

The reality is that this will likely be a long, hard climb which will require significant leadership to guide it to the right conclusion, while still pleasantly serving the members. Your effectiveness as a leader will be tested so make the leadership function of your role priority one. Good luck...

Stay Positive — Joe B.