

How you can stay objective when managing staff.

We all make thousands of inferences a day about everything. From how the barista served your morning coffee on your way to work, to what you thought a client meant in their email. Inferences influence how we see people and affect how we then treat them. That client email seemed snippy, and therefore you don't really look forward to their next email. Or that barista, who admittedly got your order wrong, was so friendly and warm that you didn't mind waiting an extra five minutes.... and you still gave them a small tip.

This level of inference and bias can sneak its way into business and managing staff. But when it comes to managing, staying as objective as possible is paramount to getting the most out of your teams.

In a study conducted by Detert, Taubenfeld and Britton titled "(I think) I know why you did that: the Risky Business of inferring intentions, Detert talks about an employee who made a small but significant mistake at work. This "employee" was then described positively to one group of people, and negatively to another. Even though the facts of the incident were the same, the first group responded sympathetically to the employee, and the second group placed more blame when the employee was described negatively. Those who had received the negative information rated the risk level of his mistake more highly, further exaggerating the magnitude of his mistake.

As a manager, you can put certain practises into place to increase objectivity to avoid situations fed off personal inference, or "gut feeling". You should consider multiple possibilities by deliberately considering different viewpoints. Is there a reason for an employee's behaviour or actions? Did you miss something when you first assessed the situation?

American president Abraham Lincoln kept a diverse cabinet referred to as "a team of rivals". He was often presented with differing and opposite viewpoints. By including a range of perspectives in a decision or leadership team, the checks and balances are there to check everyone's own bias. It can also help to create an environment that encourages respectful dialogue.

Understanding and correcting our inferences is a crucial part of people management. Employees need to see that consequences and rewards are metered out fairly to contribute to a healthy working environment. Testing inferences at each step of the decision-making process is one way to adhere to such fairness in a world of constant assumptions.

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1794706/maintain-objectivity-workplace>