WPPA SMALL PORTS SEMINAR

Small Team, Big People Responsibilities

A practical supervisor playbook for small ports

Everyday people work, even when there is no HR team



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People-Centered leadership & HR solutions

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People-centered leadership & HR solutions

We help leaders handle everyday people challenges with practical HR tools, training, and support.

Today, we'll put these ideas to work through a fictional small-port case.

People operations start with one employee

1

One employee

You still set expectations, have conversations, keep records and follow up.

Two to 35 employees

People wear several hats. Every responsibility still needs an owner and an alternate.

A one-person staff is still a team, with an employer relationship.

The role you have today

MANAGER OR SUPERVISOR	Clarify work and follow up within your authority.
OPERATIONS STAFF	Listen, capture the concern and connect the right person.
COMMISSIONER	Even with one employee, the commission is that employee's employer. Set expectations and follow up through port governance.

Which concern lands on your desk most often?

Good policy supports everyday decisions

01

DIRECTION

Who decides? Who receives a concern? What process applies?

02

CONSISTENCY

Use the same approved route for similar issues, within port authority.

03

FOLLOW-THROUGH

Record the action, protect sensitive information and set a check-in.

Know the policy before a problem. Confirm that it fits your port's roles and obligations.

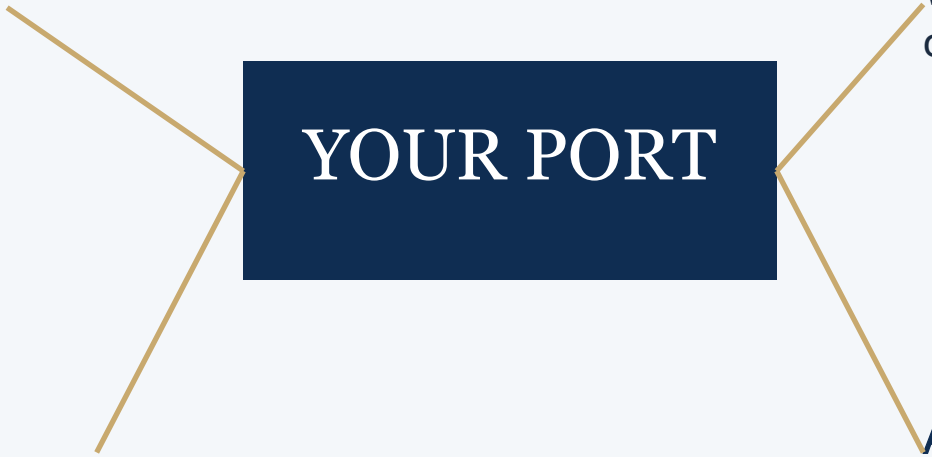
Your port's support map

DECISION AUTHORITY

Who approves coverage or employment decisions?

REQUESTS + REPORTS

Who reviews leave and receives complaints?



SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Who handles safety, records and employment advice?

ALTERNATE ROUTE

Who steps in when the primary person is away or involved?

Write a name, a way to reach them and an alternate. Mark one gap to resolve.

Help when there is no HR team

START INSIDE

Authorized leadership, retained counsel, a qualified HR adviser contacts.

PUBLIGAGENCY RESOURCES

MRSC and WPPA can help locate guidance; confirm eligibility and access.

WASHINGTON AGENCIES

L&I, Human Rights Commission, Paid Leave and State Archives publish topic guidance.

HMP's HR Box offers guides, templates and checklists for everyday people work.



When to bring in outside support

- Harassment or retaliation: secure an impartial route.
- Complex termination: check authority, policy, labor duties and counsel.
- Leave or accommodation: route promptly to a qualified reviewer.
- Unfamiliar law or issue: verify current guidance and obligations.
- Culture or leadership development: get help building consistent habits.
- Succession planning: identify critical roles, backups and development steps.



A method you can reuse



FACTS

What happened?

CONVERSATION

What does the person say?

AGREEMENT

Who owns what next?

NOTE

What should be understood later?

FOLLOW-UP

When will we check?

Boundary check throughout: safety, requests, reporting, authority and policy.

One request. An unclear handoff.

OCTOBER 6

A tenant requests a routine repair to a storage unit door. Taylor forwards the email, but the request is not entered in the shared work log. Maintenance has no assigned owner.

Taylor: office coordinator • Morgan: manager • Jordan: backup

First move: check the inbox, work log and handoff expectation before deciding what went wrong.



The first conversation

“The door repair request was not in the work log this morning. Walk me through what happened after the email arrived.”

TAYLOR

“I forwarded it to maintenance. I did not know I also needed to enter it in the log.”



A clear agreement

TASK	The door repair request reaches maintenance with an owner.
STANDARD	Enter the request, location and next owner in the shared log.
OWNER + BACKUP	Taylor logs routine requests; alerts Morgan if a backup is needed.
TIMING	Before the end of each workday; urgent matters use the immediate route.
CHECK-IN	October 9: review the log together and check the next handoff.

Morgan models one entry today and confirms Jordan as the authorized backup.

A note that helps you follow up

OCTOBER 6 • FACTS + RESPONSE

Morgan and Taylor reviewed the storagedoor repair email and shared work log. The request was forwarded but not logged or assigned to maintenance.

Taylor said forwarding seemed sufficient. Morgan explained the log requirement and modeled an entry. Taylor agreed to log routine requests before leaving and alert Morgan when backup is needed.

Next step: Morgan confirms Jordan as backup • Check in: October 9

Use the approved records system. Always, always document

Check the handoff, then decide what comes next

CHECK-IN	Review new requests together. Is each one logged with a location and owner?
IF IT WORKS	Acknowledge the change and keep the routine in place. Encourage through reinforcement.
IF IT DOES NOT	Ask what got in the way; adjust support or process. Confirm authority before formal action. Ask the question before concluding.

When a medical request comes up

“I have recurring medical appointments. Can my hours change?”

“Thank you for telling me. Let's connect you with the person who reviews these requests.”

Agree on a check‑in and authorized coverage. Keep medical details in the restricted process.



“The workload is not fair.”

“I always get the tenant calls while the other person gets uninterrupted project time.”

Ask for examples and their effect. Review assignments and coverage. Agree on a work plan and a review date.

Listen for a complaint that needs another response.



A complaint about the usual contact

“My supervisor keeps making comments about my accent. Please do not tell anyone.”

A first response

“Thank you for telling me. I cannot promise secrecy. I will limit sharing to people who need it to respond.”

Check safety • Preserve information • Use the designated alternate or independent route

The next step depends on the concern

IMMEDIATE DANGER	Use the emergency or safety process now.
ROUTINE WORK ISSUE	Clarify, agree, document and follow up within authority.
LEAVE, MEDICAL OR MISCONDUCT	Engage the designated qualified reviewer promptly.
FORMAL ACTION OR DISCLOSURE	Confirm authority, policy, labor duties and specialist review.

What can you do now? What needs another person?

Choose a new port situation

1:00

1 A dock lead retires before the busy season. Only they know the berth assignment routine. What do you transfer first, and to whom?

2 A seasonal employee gets conflicting closing instructions from two supervisors. Who sets the standard, and how do you tell the employee?

3 A commissioner asks the executive director for employee details after a public complaint. What should the director do first?

THREE OPTIONS

Pick one question with your partner.

YOUR FIRST RESPONSE

What do you say first? What is your next step?

Switch after one minutes. Then name the owner, note and boundary.

Make the handoff before deciding

A small port can advance a concern without deciding beyond its role.

01

CAPTURE

Use the person's words and immediate safety facts.

02

PROTECT

Limit sharing, preserve information, use an alternate route.

03

NAME

Find the authorized reviewer and qualified resource.

04

FOLLOW UP

Tell the person who will reconnect and when.

Your Homework Commitment:

- One thing my team shouldn't have to guess about
- One conversation or follow-up I will complete
- One support contact or alternate I will confirm

My next action: _____



Put these tools to work at your port

USE YOUR PARTICIPANT TOOLKIT

Write down one clear work agreement.
Use the conversation note to record what was said and what comes next.
Add names and alternates to your port's support map.

TAKE THE PEOPLE OPS PULSE CHECK

Answer 21 short questions about your people practices. Use the results to choose where your port should focus time and resources.

https://hmpinnacleconsulting.com/pulsecheck

Your port runs on people. Choose one step to take this week.

Questions?

Let's stay in touch.

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Thank you for the work you do for your ports and your people.

STAY IN TOUCH

Tell us what would help your port.

Share the people challenge you would like practical help with next.

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POST-TALK SURVEY

Scan after the session