Train Your Supervisors to Avoid These 10 Mistakes

We know that you know that managers and supervisors need to understand what they can and can't do in order to keep their treatment of subordinates within the limits of legal constraints. So you're giving them the requisite HR and employment law framework, right? But consultant Tom Terez suggests you add training to help them avoid what he calls "the top 10 mistakes of well-meaning managers." Here's what he's talking about:

1. Don’t strain an individual’s strengths. One team member may be good at math, at a sophisticated software program that the team uses, at creating Powerpoints, or whatever. But don’t overuse that person’s skill. It may be only a part of his or her job description, so ask about the team member’s preferences and choices—and listen to the answers.
2. Don’t use the same managerial style with every member of the team—something Terez calls “supervising on autopilot.” Everyone reacts differently to different styles. Watch for situations when a new approach will bring better results.
3. Don’t “gloss over” reality. Many supervisors want to be liked, but that desire may lead them to tell employees what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. Managers should be “forthright communicators who give people a full set of facts” about their performance and the company’s progress, says Terez.
4. In a suggestion like #1, avoid seeing subordinates in one dimension (as in, ‘Joe’s the worrier; Sam’s the procrastinator; Jane is always happy,’). Those traits may be part of their personalities, but not the whole picture. So supervisors should strive to “do nuance,” as Terez puts it.
5. Don’t conduct an employee attitude survey and then ignore the input. Share results with everyone and seek group suggestions for improving.
6. Don’t ignore the elephant in the room—looming layoffs, or a big problem that’s on everyone’s mind. Start a dialog and address the elephant directly.
7. Don’t do alone what’s best done by a group. Groups bring empowerment and trust to life. Let go and let others make some decisions.
8. Avoid overuse of ‘efficient’ communication. A mass e-mail about a sensitive issue can’t replace ‘high-touch’ approaches that take more time, like a meeting.
9. Don’t assume people feel valued. Genuine gratitude for work well done is emotional compensation, and it’s inexpensive to deliver.
10. Avoid overwork as a manager, and don’t demand it of the team. Taking a break now and then to recharge and renew will make all of you the better for it.