THE FINE LINE
Many supervisors earn their position by working their way up through the ranks. If you are one of them, this means that your promotion probably put you in the position of managing your former co-workers.

Now that you are in a management position, you’re expected to treat everyone fairly and equally no matter what your previous feelings might have been. Everyone must be held to the same objective standards, whether you’re dealing with a friend or someone you find it hard to tolerate on a personal basis.

As a new or experienced supervisor, you must walk a fine line.
Scenario A: Craig

Background:
Craig was promoted to a management position, and he supervises several employees who used to be his co-workers. One, Frank, has been a good friend for several years. The two often ate lunch or took breaks together before the promotion, and they still socialize on weekends.
Craig doesn’t want to give up his friendship, but he has to accept the fact that there must be some changes.

How do you think Craig should handle this situation?

1. Curtail his social connections with Frank in the workplace.
2. Relate to Frank the same way he relates to the rest of his supervised employees.
3. Set up clear boundaries between their professional and personal relationships.
Scenario B: Estelle

Background:
A manager named Estelle, knows that her friend and subordinate, Vicki, is having problems finding a reliable babysitter. This has caused Vicki to come in late three times in a one-month period. According to company policy, she must receive a verbal warning and be put on notice that another occurrence in the next 30 days will result in a written reprimand.

Estelle feels bad because she knows that Vicki’s mother, who used to take care of the children, had to stop because of health problems. As a friend, it’s natural to have sympathy. As a supervisor, you are required to ensure that all employees perform their jobs and are treated according to the established policies.

How should Estelle handle the discussion with Vicki?
Scenario B: Estelle

1. She should start off by reinforcing the line between their personal and professional relationship:

   “Vicki, I know that you’re going through a hard time right now. Please understand that in this discussion I’m talking to you as an employee. No matter how I might feel as a friend, it’s my responsibility to handle employment matters according to company policy. I’m sure you can understand that I have to treat everyone fairly.”

2. She should proceed with the discussion in the same way that she would handle with any employee, based directly on the company’s disciplinary requirements. Usually a friend will understand, but sometimes a person might try to take advantage of their friendship with a manipulative statement such as:

   “Yeah, I know you’re my boss and you have to do this, but we’ve known each other for five years now. You know how sick my mom is, and I’m doing everything I can. I can’t leave two little toddlers alone. Can’t you cut me a little slack? After all, we’re friends so this talk doesn’t really have to count, does it?”

3. Estelle needs to counteract it firmly by again reinforcing the personal/professional relationship otherwise, Vicki might try to push it even further.

   “As a friend, I understand that you’re in a tough position. But right now I have to approach this as your boss, and that means I have to look at your attendance and handle it according to policy. I hope you’re a good enough friend to understand why I can’t favor one person over another.” or, “In reality, if we were the friends I thought we were, you wouldn’t put me in this situation in the first place.”
1. Communicate Early and Often

✓ Acknowledge the discomfort
  “I realize that ever since I’ve become the supervisor, things aren’t as comfortable between us as they used to be” or, “It’s different between us since I’ve become supervisor, isn’t it?”

✓ Admit the uncertainty
  Follow up with: “I don’t know what that means in terms of our friendship” or, “I’m uncertain as to where that leaves you and I.”

✓ Clarify the difference between obligations and feelings
  For example: “I now have work obligations that don’t always tie in with the way I feel personally.”

✓ Ask for the employee’s support
  “I’d like your commitment to keeping our work responsibilities separate from our personal relationship.”
2. Be Mindful of Perceived Favoritism

✓ Involve employee/friend in coming up with strategy
  “Despite the fact that you and I have agreed to keep our work responsibilities separate from our personal relationship, there will always be others in the department who will view you as the boss’s favorite. How do you think we should deal with it?”

✓ Discuss it individually with the people who feel you are showing favoritism
  While this discussion will not be easy, remember that you need to have it; hoping the problem will just go away will only lead to failure.
3. Find a New Sounding Board

- Another supervisor in your organization
- A mentor outside your organization