

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

July 2024

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at (608) 775-4780 or (800) 327-9991.

- Q.** I yell a lot – I admit it! It’s my nature to get emotional, curse and slam objects on tables, etc. I am sure it rattles nerves, but I think my employees understand me. Is there any reason to change my stress management style?
- A.** Employees frequently offer each other mutual support to cope with temperamental supervisors who are prone to emotional outbursts. So your employees may appear to understand you and remain loyal. They do not confront your behavior because they are coping in another way. Still, you should take steps to manage your stress differently. EAP can help. Employees may “understand you,” but you risk being accused of creating a hostile or offensive workplace should you ever need to take action against a worker with performance problems. Your behavior might be used as a way to explain substandard performance. This would be difficult to argue against. Even worse, a troubled employee who resigns could blame you for feeling forced to quit. This could have serious ramifications for your company.
- Q.** Sometimes I discover in the middle of a corrective interview that I am responsible for the performance problem of an employee. It might be due to lack of communication, faulty instructions or lack of follow-up. Won’t I lose respect if I apologize or admit it?
- A.** Few things are harder than admitting fault, particularly in the middle of a corrective interview. But experienced managers know that no one was ever despised for admitting their mistakes. It is worse for your employee to walk away feeling unfairly corrected. Willingness to be open to admitting your own contribution to a problem can gain you respect and help your employee admit to his or her own role in the performance problem. It is a good practice when correcting performance to always ask yourself ahead of time whether you have some ownership in the problem. You might prevent the need for a corrective interview (something most supervisors do not like) or prevent having to discover your own role in the middle of the discussion.

Q. I am a worrywart about how management thinks my work unit is doing. Although I have been a manager for several years, I can't seem to quiet myself down enough to enjoy my job. What can I do to change? Can EAP help?

A. Although some worry can arguably be considered a healthy and self-preserving virtue of a good manager, being in a state of excessive anxiety and distress will interfere with your ability to perform the duties of your position. Recognizing that your worrying cannot exist in isolation but will affect the employees you supervise can motivate you to gain better control over it. EAP can help you locate sources of help and understanding in what contributes to your worrisome state. There are many approaches including thought blocking; stress management techniques; reinterpreting the balance between reality, fears and worry; and making sure no medical condition contributes to your anxiety.

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