

# FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Fall 2012

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## How to Deal with a Grumpy Personality



**Q.** One of my employees is a very grumpy person. This irritated persona has been tolerated by coworkers, mostly because we think of it

as a personality style. I have never made this issue a performance matter, but have frequently thought about it. Is it too late?

**A.** It is not too late to get started, but there are steps to consider in helping your employee. You must document clearly what you and others witness so it can be used effectively in a constructive confrontation. This is not as easy as it sounds - many supervisors struggle with describing behaviors that adversely affect performance, such as verbal tone, attitude, and nonverbal communication. A consult with your EAP can help immensely. Discuss your goal, take notes during your meeting, and be clear on how you will communicate to the employee what you would like changed. A role-play with the EAP can also help you. Chances are, you will see short-term improvement after the first meeting with your employee, but sustained improvement may not be forthcoming until underlying issues are addressed. That may require formal referral to the EAP.

## Improving Collaboration

**Q.** I have an ambitious employee who produces great work, but collaborating with others is a problem for him. He experiences too many power struggles, and before long he starts managing others on a team rather than collaborating with them. Any tips on managing or referring to the EAP?

**A.** Your employee may enjoy being with coworkers, but prefers the leadership role over collaboration. It is, however, equally important to learn both roles, or increased alienation of coworkers will result. Meet in private with your employee and describe the issue as you see it. Your employee's ability to receive feedback will be an indicator of amenability to change. Consider a mini-performance improvement contract, with the goal of demonstrating improved ability to collaborate with peers. If issues continue, arrange a referral to the EAP, who will help your employee understand how his desire to control interferes with productivity. The EAP will also help your employee understand how powerful collaboration can be for work teams. Your employee undoubtedly has leadership strengths, so the goal should be to help him apply these skills appropriately.



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## Secret to Having Passionate Employees

Q. Can I create a work culture where employees are passionate and excited about what we do, or is this an accidental experience like “charisma” that is out of my control? I would love to learn the secret to having a high-energy group of happy folks on the job.

A. You can set the stage for a passionate and positive work culture, but ensuring that it happens is less certain. There are accepted principles to consider, however. One commonsense idea is to hire passionate employees. (Their brilliance is important, but the energy they display is even more important.) Put them in key posts so they rub off on others. Use effective communication to help employees bond. Manage conflicts with efficiency, and you will reap more positive outcomes from them. When difficult employees and employees with personal problems demonstrate performance issues, use the EAP to resolve these issues. There is no other mechanism that can substitute for this resource. Passionate people in workplaces have fun because energy “spills” into spontaneity and authentic relationships. These relationships naturally translate into longer working hours. Be sure to recognize, praise, and reward those who go the extra mile. Keep your employees in touch with the big picture and the organization’s goals. Finally, expect and promote a respectful workplace as relationships emerge and develop.



## Overcoming Resistance to Change

Q. I’ve observed employees who have heavy workloads resisting organizational change even when they are finally able to share their work burden or give up work they complained about for years. Why?



A. Resistance frequently occurs when employees face organizational change, even if they personally benefit from it. This resistance is usually not evidence of employees having personal problems, and is typically not cause for alarm. Much resistance can be prevented by educating employees about how they may respond to change. This education can vary in its complexity. At a minimum, employees should understand that if organizational change calls for giving up something like job duties or prestige, changing an office location, or losing coworkers, then resistance can emerge. Even the loss of a familiar routine or pride in a specific task can create resistance or conflict. The common denominator, of course, is loss. It is not always possible to prepare employees for change, but your EAP can help or supplement organizational efforts at planning for change. This may include one-on-one counseling for employees, to confidentially help them examine personal reactions to change and loss, understand what’s motivating resistance, cope with insecurities that undermine acceptance of the organization’s change goals, and more. Talk to the EAP to learn more.

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