

Frontline Supervisor

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Workplace Bullies

Q. It seems like bullies in the workplace often have some type of power, even if only imagined. Is this correct? What's the supervisor's role in prevention? Would employee training help reduce risk?

A. You're correct. Employees who bully often possess some degree of power – supervisory, tenure, delegated, indirect, or team leadership. Some bullies may perceive or mistakenly believe that they have power or authority, and this can prompt their aggressive behavior. Obviously, bullies can exist anywhere in the organization, so conducting general education and awareness trainings is helpful. This should include self-assessment for the potential perpetrator or victim. Throw in a zero-tolerance policy toward bullying, and a significant risk reduction can be achieved. Supervisors should also be aware that a bully is often a trusted employee who is relied upon by the immediate supervisor for knowledge, expertise, and skills. He or she can be passionate and loyal to the organization. Nevertheless, if a supervisor becomes overly dependent on this “right-hand man/gal” relationship, bullying behaviors may emerge.



Effective Incentives



Q. Over the years, I have read many articles that reinforce the generally accepted principle that money is not a good long-term motivator for employees. What works instead is praise, recognition, and commendation. It sounds pretty simple. Why don't all supervisors understand this?

A. A 2009 survey by *McKinsey Quarterly* asked which incentives were most effective at motivating employees. The top two responses were: “Praise and commendation from my immediate manager” (67 percent) and “Attention from leaders” (62 percent). This is strong evidence that development of praise and commendation skills can have an impact on the bottom line. Of course, there is more to it than simply telling supervisors to praise employees more. Giving praise comes easily for some supervisors, but not others. In most instances, it is not that supervisors don't want to give effective praise; instead, the issue is that they don't know how or don't feel comfortable doing so. Common statements heard from supervisors who struggle with giving praise are that it takes too much time, it feels insincere, or even that it doesn't match their brusque personality. These statements of resistance have solutions, and the EAP is an excellent resource for supervisors to discover those solutions.

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Improving the Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship

Q. There is a common saying in management that employees don't leave their companies, they leave their supervisors. Obviously, this means the quality of the supervisor-supervisee relationship is crucial. Does the EAP have a role in helping managers maintain good relationships with employees?

A. An employee's relationship with his or her supervisor is indeed a crucial one. Unless this relationship is constructive and positive, the risk of losing a worker to another employer or, worse, to a competitor, will remain unacceptably high. Kevin Sheridan, a business consultant specializing in talent management, reports in his new book, *Building a Magnetic Culture* (2012), that engaged employees are ten times more likely to feel their work is recognized, that their supervisors and top management care about them, and that they are getting useful feedback. Such employees are four times less likely to leave. Obviously, the supervisor is a key influencer in helping employees get these needs met. EAPs have a role to play because the skills and abilities of their consultants can help supervisors enhance their relationships with employees. The purview of EAP work is often the business of improving relationships; therefore, use of the EAP is an excellent strategy for increasing employee engagement and improving business outcomes.



Holding Employees Accountable

Q. How can I hold employees accountable without making them feel that I am beating up on them or them getting overly defensive?

A. Willingness to be personally accountable for one's life is learned, and this attitude extends to the workplace. Your own view of accountability is important, so help your employees anticipate being held accountable. Always be sure there is no ambivalence about the results you expect. Some supervisors see accountability as a measure of "blameworthiness" when things go wrong. Do you approach your employees with this orientation? If so, you may need to communicate your goals more effectively and frequently.

Identifying Signs of Stress

Q. I don't want to diagnose my employees, but I *would* like to know which behaviors strongly indicate that employees are too stressed. I figure if I know the behavioral issues and spot them, I can then suggest use of the EAP based on what I am seeing. Does that make sense?

A. You do have a role in maintaining a safe and healthful work environment, so keeping an eye open for behavior or conduct that interferes with productivity is a good idea. You should not diagnose employees, but you can be attuned to the obvious. Visible behaviors or conduct issues may include anxiety, indecisiveness, irritability, complaints, forgetfulness, loss of self-confidence, customer conflicts, complaints of insomnia, sleeping on the job or coming back late from lunch/breaks because of oversleeping, argumentativeness, moodiness/mood swings, crying, and leaving early with complaints of physical exhaustion.

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