

Frontline Supervisor

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Communicating Up the Chain

Q. There's a whole lot of help out there about how to manage down the chain of command. I need help going the other direction: up. How can I manage upward to get more support from my boss?

A. Consider what you're contributing to the relationship with your supervisor in order to improve the benefits you're getting from it. If you're concerned with a lack of support from above, consider the foundation below that is supporting the relationship. In other words, first examine your communication habits in relation to your supervisor—Do you explicitly ask for support? Do you regularly keep him informed about day-to-day events? Do you tap into her expertise or seek her perspective on your workload? Do you ask for guidance to manage unusually tough situations? An engaged supervisor-supervisee relationship requires trust, being genuine and allowing yourself to be vulnerable in the communication process. Call your MIIA EAP to help you decide how to design your foundation, in order to get the best from the structure above it. Everyone in the chain—you, your boss, and your employees—can benefit from strengthening your upward relationships.

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Keeping Top Talent

Q. Retaining “top talent” is very important in our organization. Management expects supervisors to keep our best and brightest happy and productive. What are the fundamentals of doing this?

A. Meeting the needs of talented employees is a popular management topic currently. Talented employees have a need to work in an environment that supports their continued growth. Beyond pay, the fundamentals include: giving them frequent feedback, communicating effectively, setting clear expectations, and offering opportunities for training and skill development, and potential for advancement of responsibilities. There is nothing new about these employee desires, but talented employees today have higher expectations for getting this support faster than in decades past. With no guarantee of long-term employment or a hefty retirement, talented employees (and most employees in general) feel more pressure to ascend rapidly in their career.

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Although you may not necessarily influence the company's offerings on a large-scale level, you can take control of what type of supervisor you are to these employees. Call your MIIA EAP to advance your supervisory skills or learn new methods of managing people. Consulting with a MIIA Employee Assistance Professional can be a particularly valuable tool to make use of in your quest for retaining valued employees.

Choose Wisely: Communication Methods & Customer Service

Q. With all the communication options available in the workplace nowadays, I believe we have to be wiser than ever about choosing the most effective method. Making the wrong choice between a telephone call, email, post, tweet, text, or face-to-face meeting can lead to disaster. How can I improve my employees' judgment and skill level in this area?

A. Communication styles vary by industry, organization, culture, as well as individual skill levels. Start by discussing your expectations for quality customer service—for internal and external customers. Based on the nature of your employees' work, discuss the implications of proper and improper choices of communication methods. Identify the most frequent communication pitfalls and brainstorm possible successful outcomes. Walk through (aka role play) scenarios commonly faced by your employees, to build their skills. To better guide them, consider establishing policies and/or circulating tip sheets as reminders of how and when to use these various communication tools.

Management Nerves: You're Only Human

Q. I'm nervous about an upcoming disciplinary meeting I have to have with my employee. I'm worried my nerves will cause me to appear anxious and inexperienced. Is there anything I can do to prevent this?

A. Your nervous anticipation is completely normal and your MIIA EAP can help with this situation. Use your MIIA EAP to discuss the situation as well as the previous interventions and outcomes tried with this employee. To reduce the degree of nervousness, work with a MIIA EAP Counselor to prepare and rehearse how you'll approach the employee and address the concern. Your Human Resources Office can also be of assistance to you to ensure you follow protocol and enforce policies according to the organization's expectations.

Build Your Skills

~ Tips For Preparing For & Conducting a Disciplinary Conversation ~

- Anticipate the kind of questions the employee may ask, or comments s/he may make.
- Practice your possible answers; keep your responses clear and concise.
- Stay focused on the problematic behavior and the improvement you need to see.
- Don't allow the employee to distract you by pointing fingers at others, or pull on your heart strings with excuses for the unacceptable behaviors.
- Keep in mind, it is not your job to have the employee walk away feeling "OK". It is your job to hold them accountable and help them get back on track.
- Knowing how you'll structure your meeting will also reduce your nervousness.

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