

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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MIIA Employee Assistance Program

Low Energy Employees

Q. I am a new supervisor and see a lot of low energy among employees in my work group. There's no excitement or enthusiasm for what they do. Something is not right, but no one is talking. How do I find out what's wrong?



A. Meet with each employee in a private meeting and ask how things are going. It's the most direct route to discovery. Avoid observing the group, teambuilding, or

holding gripe sessions to "get it all out on the table." Don't be mysterious about your intentions. Conduct a few each day until you see everyone. Be up front and say you want to greet everyone individually and learn confidentially about important issues. Ask employees to bring proposed solutions, not just issues. You may notice employees perk up immediately. This results from employees telling their stories and feeling hopeful. Be cautious; this won't last unless you take action. Formulate a plan from what you learn to address issues. Ask management to give input and approval. Don't forget about the EAP. It can serve as a great sounding board and offer insights because of its unique role as an observer of organizational process.

Self Managing

Q. What is the one area of managing employees where supervisors most often fall short?



A. Surprisingly, supervisors most often fall short in managing themselves. Most supervisors learn on the job, and may need time to fully grasp the multitude of issues associated with managing employees and their personal growth. The Menninger Foundation (America's first private practice in psychiatry) spent time examining the supervisor's role in an institution and published a list of helpful tips. This insightful list addresses self-awareness, managing stress properly, maintaining a healthy perspective on the supervisory role, having a source of mentorship and inputs, understanding how to learn from one's mistakes and failures, managing one's emotions, and taking time to reflect on events and incidents daily to gather lessons learned. You can see the entire list beginning on page 104 of an article from the University of Michigan School of Social Work titled "Essentials of Supervisory Skills for Child Welfare Managers." The title is available at <http://archive.ssw.umich.edu/public/currentProjects/tpcws/articles.html> under "Other Articles".

Management Consultation Services

- Employee Performance
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- Conflict Resolution
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- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family Issues
- Stress Management
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- Financial
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Dealing With Disrespect



Q. My employee argues with me in ways that I would not have dreamt of when I was his age 25 years ago. What can I do about a disrespectful employee? Is this part of the “transformational” world we live in, or do I need to be more assertive?

A. Some things should not change. One of them is respect and civility. You must assert your authority with an employee who is disrespectful. Meet with your employee and list incidents that are unacceptable. State that the behaviors will incur consequences if the disrespect continues. Your employee may claim that he is not being disrespectful, but you’ll need to define the standards of behavior and expect change. The good news is that you will probably be successful in correcting this behavior in one interview, because most employees heed direct messages of this sort. The EAP can help, but don’t let the behaviors continue too long before making a referral. Other issues may contribute to an inability to control this behavior, and the EAP would sort them out.

Building Trust

Q. I am a newly hired supervisor and would like to build trust with my employees quickly. Can you offer any tips?

A. You can’t rush trust, but here are a few tips to prevent setbacks. 1) Do what you say you are going to do. Employees have memories like elephants for promises made by supervisors. 2) Communicate frequently, not just when there is big news, good or bad. Communication is the only way employees will discover what you want them to know about you, so the more frequent, the better. 3) Act appropriately with employees, but avoid being reserved, aloof, remote, or a conformist. Let them see the real you, and use opportunities like birthdays or special occasions to express your sentiments to individuals. 4) When possible, do not harbor negative news and then drop it on employees at “the right time.” Try to first prepare employees for what might be coming. 5) The more employees see you and talk with you individually and in groups, the more trust you will build. Many chief executive officers who understand this principle teach in-house courses or hold seminars on leadership, communication, and networking skills that any employee may attend. They build trust and their reputations flourish as a result.

Post-Referral Checklist

Q. Can you give me a checklist of what to do after I refer an employee to the EAP?

A. The purpose of following up is to evaluate and monitor the improved performance of the employee whose original conduct led to the formal EAP referral. Consider the following: 1) Schedule regular meetings to review performance after the referral; 2) Consult with the EAP immediately if performance problems return or new ones emerge;

3) Expect satisfactory performance. Reject excuses blamed on slow treatment progress; 4) With formal supervisor referrals, request that the release of confidentiality signed by your employee remain active; and 5) Keep your focus on job performance and agreements to cooperate with the EAP as evidence of treatment success, not the discoveries and positive insights shared by your employee learned in treatment or professional counseling.

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