

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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**MIIA
Employee
Assistance
Program**

800.451.1834

Referring Employees Who Don't Think They Need Help

Q. What if I refer an employee to the EAP and they don't think they need it? Isn't it important for the employee being referred to somewhat believe they need help so it is not a waste of the EAP's time?

A. The EAP would not consider it a waste of time to meet with an employee who at first appears unmotivated, in denial, or otherwise convinced they do not need help. The important issue is whether the employee came of their own volition. Regarding motivation, desire, and insight—these often arrive later by way of an assessment and use of interviewing techniques called motivational counseling. It is quite normal for troubled employees to walk into an EAP office with one or more of three common viewpoints: 1) It's my supervisor's fault—I am not the one with the problem; 2) I am only here because I was told I had to come; and 3) I have no idea why I am here. All three of these are standard fare for EAPs, and EA professionals know how to address each one.

How Much Feedback?

Q. I give feedback to my employees—each one—several times a year, but I do not use the “walking around to catch people doing things right” approach I see in management reading material. How much feedback and how often is recommended by experts?

A. Giving praise and feedback, including negative feedback to employees, is less about frequency and numbers than about how this communication helps produce a work climate that develops your staff and helps them achieve their work objectives. Many supervisors fail to understand the personal power they possess to influence their employees' morale, motivation, desire to perform, innovation, desire to put in the hours, or their ability to feel good about themselves and the company itself. Supervisors are in control of all these things by way of a dynamic called “delegated authority.” A supervisor's ability to influence these attitudes and behaviors is not earned like respect. It comes instantaneously with the title, unless it is undermined in some way. The ideal balance regarding feedback exists when no employees are questioning where they stand with you and what you think about their performance.

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Proactive Management

Q. I was recently reprimanded and told to be more proactive in my management style. The leadership also wants my employees to fall in line with this approach. What is proactive management, and how do I instill this in employees? Can the EAP help with something like this?

A. Proactive means “anticipatory.” Management wants your energies and resources used to think ahead, anticipate problems and issues, and do less “reacting” to problems your work unit experiences. Here’s the key: When managing proactively, you strategize and target problems that have not happened yet in an effort to prevent them. You cannot just “think” proactively. Instead, you target the risk with interventions to reduce or eliminate them. The EAP is not an expert on your specific functions, but is experienced at coaching, analyzing, and examining the mandate you’ve been given. That assistance can help you keep on track and help ensure that you follow through on management’s directive. For more insight, consider the only book dedicated to this topic, *“Proactive Personality and Behavior for Individual and Organizational Productivity”* (New Horizons in Management series) by Andrew J. DuBrin.

Most Common Bullying Behaviors

Q. What are the five most commonly perpetrated bullying behaviors?

A. Research varies, but according to the Workplace Bullying Institute, the five most common bullying behaviors are: 1) Falsely accusing the victim of errors not actually made (“Oh, now look what you’ve done”), but refusing to show or prove any error. 2) Staring, glaring, or behaving nonverbally in order to intimidate, but clearly showing hostility. 3) Discounting the person’s thoughts or feelings in meetings with peers (“Gee, duh, thanks for sharing, Susan.”) 4) Using the silent treatment to “ice out” and separate the victim from others. 5) Making up rules on the fly that the bully himself or herself does not follow but has then imposed on the victim. Understanding the broad range of bullying behaviors can help you spot them. To learn more, visit www.workplacebullying.org.

Reducing Workplace Stress

Q. Supervisors are supposed to play a role in reducing workplace stress. What areas of workplace stress most affect employees? Knowing what they are would help me consider strategies to at least deal with the most important issues. I know I can’t intervene in everything.

A. You are correct. You won’t be able to intervene in every issue, but there are broad categories of stress worth knowing about to help you stay attuned to relationship and workplace dynamics. Stress research usually focuses on three areas: 1) conflicts with supervisors, 2) complaints about the work culture and factors associated with it, and 3) dissatisfaction with making too minimal a contribution, not feeling like one belongs, is included, or fits in. This includes a feeling of not being valued for one’s contributions to the achievements of the work unit. Keep these categories in mind in conversations with employees and when dealing with normal workplace conflict. They can alert you to take action, and this can reduce turnover if you jump on problems quickly and resolve them. Turn to the EAP to help you, as needed.

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