

# FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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## Failure to Make Requested Changes

**Q.** From the EAP's perspective, what is the most common explanation employees give as to why they failed to make the changes in their performance requested by the supervisor in a corrective interview?



**A.** The most common reasons cited by employees for why performance changes requested in a corrective interview with the supervisor were not forthcoming include misunderstanding what the supervisor said, or denying the request was made. When you interview an employee and make clear the significant changes you want, you must put that information in writing and follow up shortly afterward to clarify that the understanding remains. This eliminates "wishful listening," also known as "hearing only what you want to hear." Here's the supervision maxim: Any unknown discrepancy between what you wanted and what the employee understood will grow larger as time passes between the original corrective interview and the follow-up meeting.

## Common Mistakes When Confronting Troubled Employees

**Q.** What's the most common mistake supervisors make when confronting troubled employees?

**A.** The most common mistake is not doing it in time. Not confronting an employee as

soon as an inappropriate situation occurs is one of the worst mistakes supervisors make. This doesn't mean that the confrontation must immediately include a corrective interview. This is where a second mistake often occurs: because many supervisors link confrontation and corrective interviews, they believe the two actions must happen at the same time. They don't. As a result, a supervisor may fail to confront an employee because the timing isn't right, they're busy, it's the end of the day, or they simply don't have the energy for one more thing on their plate. Barring an emergency, these are legitimate reasons for not having a meeting to correct behavior or performance, but not for delaying a brief confrontation and arranging a meeting for a later time—that day, or even several days later. The problem with lack of confrontation is often its negative effect: unstated approval.

## Characteristics of Good Communication

**Q.** What should I measure to know if my work unit can be characterized as having “good communication”? I would like to gauge the quality of communication and respond accordingly.

**A.** A work unit characterized by good communication will typically demonstrate strong employee engagement, strong teams with high morale, and the ability to sustain a competitive spirit among a productive group of people. One or more of these things is usually adversely affected when internal communication suffers. Delving deeper, the most commonly cited employee complaints linked to problematic communication are poor information flow between management and line staff, and lack of recognition and praise for employees. When you have a troubled employee or an employee who is not performing to expected standards, always analyze at least the factors mentioned above and the role they might play in your approach to correcting performance. This is because behavioral manifestations of personal problems are often influenced or exacerbated by issues in the work environment, also referred to as corporate climate.



## Uncivil Employees



**Q.** We have some pretty uncivil people in our workplace. I’m not talking about bullying, but instead nasty notes, silent treatments, withholding information, or not inviting someone to lunch. What can supervisors do? Perhaps I am just oversensitive and shouldn’t care.

**A.** Lost productivity, diminished employee loyalty, and turnover costs all stem from incivility in the workplace. Workplace incivility often stems from the absence of visible, proactive leadership and regular communication. If you have characteristically been visibly absent or you seldom meet to discuss team issues, start doing so. You may see some of these behaviors instantly stop. Employees take their cues from you on how to speak, behave, and engage with others. They notice your attitude, demeanor, personality, disposition, and how you treat others. All of these things play a role in influencing their behavior. You possess a natural form of power that comes from being in charge, making decisions, and enforcing standards. This is wonderful leverage for creating a positive work environment. Incivility is motivated by the desire to exert power over another, demonstrate frustration, or attain something desired. Tell employees you want a more civil workplace and expect it to happen. You will be surprised at how fast things can turn around.

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