

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Summer 2014

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Culture Fit



Q. How do I deal with an employee we hired very recently who does not appear to be a good culture fit for

our organization? Performance is good, but issues with communication exist and like-mindedness with the rest of our employees is lacking.

A. Culture fit enhances productivity, and can help prevent conflicts and reduce turnover. Unhappy employees tend to leave, so your goal should be to avoid that outcome. Don't dismiss culture fit as completely irrelevant to job performance requirements, but you must describe specifically what you mean so that documentation can work—you can describe what you want and evaluate improvement later. Discuss the circumstances with the EAP, and determine an approach to help your employee better assimilate to the work culture. Consider team issues, interpersonal communication, isolation, argumentative behavior, attitude issues, avoiding of associates, personal disposition, and buy-in to the organization's mission. Be aware that your employee may also have personal problems that are manifesting as issues of culture fit.

Referring Difficult Employees

Q. There were a few employees I did not refer to the EAP in the past, because I felt that they were too manipulative and dishonest and would easily snow the program. What's the argument for referring these employees?

A. The EAP is not just a place to counsel employees. It is a programmatic approach to resolving performance problems associated with troubled workers. This perspective is lost when EAPs are thought of only as offices where employees go to get help. From the employer's perspective, the EAP approach always works. "Works" does not mean that an employee is always successfully treated and returned to his or her original state of competence and capacity, although that is the most desirable outcome. Instead, it means that every method has been provided to accommodate the employee toward the organization's goal of resolving the performance or conduct issues. The most important dynamic in this process, and the one that makes EAPs succeed, is when difficult employees accurately perceive organizational resolve and clarity on what will happen if performance problems continue. When this happens, even the most difficult employees will pursue wellness in their self-interest, motivated by the need to avoid job loss.

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Establishing Credibility

Q. How can I earn more credibility with my work unit and team? I know many of them are far more knowledgeable than I am, yet I hesitate to let on how much I don't know. It's a Catch-22: I know the least, but I must lead a team of employees who know more.

A. You can still establish credibility as a leader. Ironically, your first step is to admit what you don't know and ask for input. Many managers or supervisors have less knowledge about products, systems, and processes than those they supervise. Even if you were the one with more knowledge, the basics of supervision and leadership would be more important. Employees want you to show dedication to what they are doing. They want you to value their capabilities and help them strengthen their skills; they want to feel your passion about the job. Your employees don't want to sit in unproductive meetings; they want you to create opportunities for them and generally help them be happier on the job. Find out what your employees' unmet needs are and how to make their jobs more meaningful. You may be considered the best leader they've ever had.

Supervisor Self-Doubt

Q. The worst part of supervision for me is self-doubt. I am sure other supervisors experience the same problem and suffer in silence too. After all, you can't let people know you're doubting your ability to do the job. How can supervisors better manage this worry?

A. You've cited one of the reasons for the cliché "It's lonely at the top." There is hardly a supervisor or leader who has not wondered, no matter how briefly, whether he or she will cut it, succeed, or make significant contributions. Intervention with this sort of anxiety is mostly about maintaining perspective. You've succeeded in becoming a manager, and naturally that comes with pressure to perform. Take steps to get support. Use the confidential support of the EAP to quickly find reassurance, resources, and strategies to help you improve your skills and reduce negative self-talk. If needed, you can find short, inexpensive courses online that perfectly match the supervision concern you feel needs addressing.

Resolving Chronic Problems

Q. When performance issues stem from personal problems at home, it may be appropriate to demonstrate patience while the employee seeks help. Unfortunately, many employees seem to have chronic problems. How can supervisors influence employees to resolve their personal problems permanently?

A. Follow-up is the key to helping employees remain successful after referral to the EAP. Don't underestimate how long this should continue. Follow-up means regularly meeting with an employee to discuss performance, reinforcing progress, and trouble-shooting obstacles. It also means getting regular feedback from the EAP (with a signed release) so continued participation and cooperation with EAP recommendations can be confirmed. Open communication between employee, EAP, and supervisor is crucial. In its absence, the risk of problems continuing is high. Take the advice of the EAP on the length of time recommended for follow-up, or ask about it. Some personal problems are easier to treat and manage than others. Those that require more personal sacrifice and lifestyle changes tend to have the highest relapse rates, making follow up critical to successful resolution of performance problems.

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