

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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Winter 2013

MIIA Employee Assistance Program

800.451.1834

Available 24/7

Benefits of Socializing

Q. My department head gave me an uneasy look the other day, because my employees were in the break room socializing instead of working at their desks. Personally, I think there is value in socializing for morale, but how rigid should I be about curbing it?



A. Your question is an age-old one for supervisors. You're right about socializing: it does benefit morale, and employees who enjoy each other's company are more likely to be energetic and stick around. Some management experts argue that socializing employees are more productive, and that frequent interaction facilitates creativity, self-assessment, synergism, new ideas, and the ability to learn about and recognize each other's strengths. It's also true, however, that socializing employees may avoid work or be easily distracted, so there can be such a thing as too much socializing. How much distraction, socializing, and hanging out in the break room is too much? You're the only one who can answer that question. Now that you have a better awareness of the benefits of socializing on the job, you can view and manage it as a resource, rather than an annoyance.

Encouraging Employees to Discuss Concerns

Q. How can I get employees to share their concerns about the work unit in a straightforward manner? Some pout and complain to peers, but never speak up in meetings - I am concerned that this will cause morale issues and encourage negative behavior from others.

A. Even if there are plenty of opportunities to directly raise concerns about the work unit, some employees will remain silent and seek to air frustrations in gripe sessions with coworkers. Doing so is a dependable way to gain sympathy, bond with peers, or join with others who do the same thing. This behavior is not necessarily harmful, and most workplaces experience it to some extent. Problems arise when this becomes a primary way of venting frustrations. Gripping employees are keeping valuable information from you that could improve the efficiency and productivity of the organization or work unit. Encourage employees to come forward, and meet with them one-on-one throughout the year. If possible, consider adding "ability to discuss concerns" as part of their review, and establish performance standards on this matter. Don't forget to consider a referral to the EAP if the problem isn't resolved. With assistance, you can guide employees toward the new behaviors you need them to acquire.

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Strategies to Combat Workplace Negativity

Q. Supervisors are not group therapists, so how can we play a role in resolving workplace negativity? I admit I see plenty of it, but am inclined to ignore it as long as the work gets done. Perhaps I am not aware of the true impact of negativity, and should implement strategies to help stop it.



A. If you are unaware of the costs associated with workplace negativity or the strategies that can fight it, you'll more easily ignore it, tolerate it, or even join in it. **W o r k p l a c e** negativity isn't just

about employees griping or picking on each other, or about what's overheard in the washroom. Workplace negativity damages the work culture, and a deliberate approach is often required to reverse it. Your primary tool for fighting negativity is communication. Intervening may not be easy, but the trick is to not give up. You may not be able to stop layoffs, but you can facilitate support systems, improve communication, and provide quicker responses to unfounded rumors. Talk to the EAP, and be open-minded if asked about your supervision style; perhaps it contributes unwittingly to workplace negativity. Examining all angles is important. Strategies will vary depending on the issues, but once you decide upon an approach, be sure to establish systems that help prevent the return to a negative work culture.

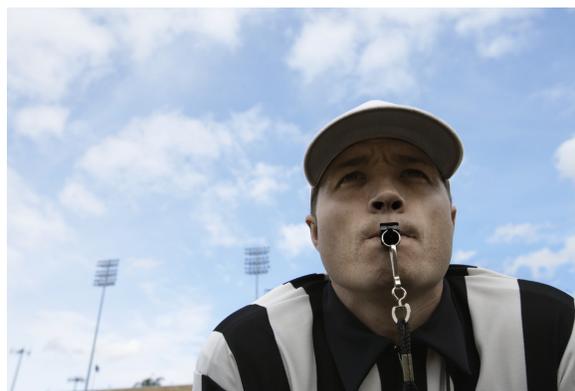
Developing Positive Leadership Qualities

Q. I am a new manager in my organization, and I want to do a good job. I am not trying to be liked, but I know leadership is not like it is on a TV show, where being "tough" and intimidating can still leave employees thinking you're a hero. What skills should I develop in order to become a successful leader?



A. Being a good leader or manager includes getting the work done, but your success will also depend

on your ability to develop relationships and trust among those you lead. This can be a tough assignment for some managers. A good supervisor is usually liked by those they supervise, but it is a payoff for first being effective with people. To be effective, meet with individual employees privately, and discover what talents, hopes and goals they possess. Use this information to develop and challenge them during the year. Praise them for good work, and behave the way you'd like your employees to behave: come to work on time, be reliable, follow through, fix problems quickly, and be honest about what's going on in the company. Talk to the EAP early on if you experience or sense trouble in relating to employees, or if you feel disconnected from them.



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