

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ We have conducted sexual harassment prevention training for employees and supervisors. I know a channel for bringing complaints forward is also crucial. Can you discuss that, and in particular, precautionary tips for the supervisor who receives such complaints.

Education is an important prevention measure. Another part of prevention/intervention is reinforcement of the policies so employees understand and are encouraged to use them. You want to know when employees are being discriminated against, being harassed, or facing other problems like bullying on the job. Periodically remind employees about the complaint procedure and if you are a supervisor, be careful not to minimize or ignore complaints brought to you by employees. In all of these cases, you are highly encouraged to consult with your human resource representative. Be careful not to ignore indirect complaints and passing comments about problems from victims or third parties. Do not treat harassment complaints as “personality conflicts” in need of some sort of coaching or mediation. Steps like these taken by supervisors that minimize or “define problems down” place organizations at risk. Hostile and intimidating behavior info can be found at hr.wisc.edu/hib/addressing-hib; sexual harassment info can be found at compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/campus-procedures/reporting.

■ How do I coach an employee with a negative attitude? Until now, I have ignored or avoided this employee. Should I continue this approach and coach others to do the same, or intervene? If I intervene, what steps can I use before referring to the EAO?

Many workplaces have a negative employee who has the potential to erode morale and productivity. Since attitude is not an observable behavior, you will need to identify the actions you have observed that are concerning. This can look like someone focusing on the negative in each situation, redirecting blame, jumping to conclusions, talking behind co-worker’s backs or undermining supervisory authority with a flow of criticism that stays under the radar so it is rarely corrected. Meet with the employee to share your concerns and identify the impact of their behavior on others who work with him/her. Be specific about what you have observed, and what you want them to do instead. Can a supervisor help someone change a negative attitude? Yes, but not directly. They can, however, coach for improved behaviors that can lead to a change in attitude. Reinforcing positive changes that you notice and referring the individual to the EAO for confidential assessment and coaching can provide additional support for positive change.

■ **Is there a way to not just motivate employees to do their job but also have them go to the next level and become excited and proactive about their role and the organization's mission? Or is it just pure luck if you get an employee who can motivate him- or herself like this?**

Some employees do motivate themselves because they have learned that love of the job comes by engaging the organization, understanding their role and its importance, and seeing all the possibilities before them. To inspire employees, spend time with them and demonstrate your own enthusiasm so they can see it. Help them get clear about their role and your performance expectations. (A common complaint heard by EAPs from employees is a lack of understanding of what the supervisor wants from them.) Help employees understand the organization's strategic plan and direction, their role in it, and the value of their work. Always let employees have some say in what they would like to accomplish, and set goals, evaluate, and give feedback during the year.

■ **Is it ever appropriate to encourage employees to quit their job versus referring them to the EAO? I think some employees would do better with another employer and would be happier and healthier as a result.**

Employee Assistance is in the business of helping employees resolve personal problems that may affect job performance, so it would never be advisable to encourage an employee to quit as a solution to his or her personal issues if the employee has not been afforded the opportunity to consult with the EAO. The EAO referral should be attempted early in the process of this situation you describe. If you have not done so, refer the individual now. The EAO can then help the employee make the best decision based upon all the issues discovered in the confidential assessment. Sometimes, the reality is that an individual's personality and skills don't match their job, and it might be helpful to explore other options. This can be done by looking into the career counseling office on campus (<https://acsss.wisc.edu/career-and-educational-planning>).

■ **A couple of weeks ago, I met with my employee to discuss attendance issues and make a referral to the EAO. The employee rejected the referral, but attendance has been perfect ever since. Should I tell the EAO about this meeting?**

There are a few reasons for doing this. Although this meeting was two weeks ago, let the EAO know about it. Your employee may have contacted EAO and sought help to resolve the issue impacting attendance on their own, and this cannot be shared with you because of confidentiality. Additionally, the EA professional may offer guidance to you on managing your employee's attendance issues if they should return.