

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



■ **I overheard that one of my employees has a teen who was caught selling marijuana in school. The father of the teen is an excellent worker. Should I leave this issue alone, not say anything, or mention the EAO as a resource?**

**In a private** conversation, let your employee know that you overheard a conversation about his child's problem. Mention the EAO and say that the professionals there can offer several types of support helpful to the family, including referral to expert resources in the community, help for understanding unique issues associated with parenting a teenager with a drug use problem, follow-up, support, and education. Encouraging use of the EAO may also reduce lost productivity or future attendance problems as your employee manages the legal problems, treatment issues, probation, and enforcement of his child's participation in a recovery program. This can be a rocky road that involves relapse, parenting challenges, and crises requiring the support of experts that the EAO can help locate.

■ **What are the most common mistakes that supervisors make that undermine their goal of getting exemplary performance from employees?**

**Managers often** forget the importance of effective communication and remaining proactive. This is the starting point for preventing performance problems. Poor communication typically leads to late interventions, after a crisis of performance already exists. Good communication means periodically reviewing and clarifying expectations and discussing performance problems. Beyond these things, many supervisors do not have employees communicate their own understanding of what precisely must be done to meet acceptable standards. And, supervisors often do not discuss what outstanding performance looks like and how it is measured. When outstanding performance is clearly outlined, most employees will keep it mind, and if they don't seek this level of performance, are inspired to perform well above standard. Busy supervisors sometimes step in too late, whereas acting early would save them enormous stress. Late intervention may find that the relationship with the employee has deteriorated, and this further compounds the difficulty of correcting performance.

■ **When employees are in conflict, it can disrupt work flow and group harmony, but should supervisors intervene in every**

**Most supervisors know** conflict is normal in the workplace, and responding to conflict is part of a supervisor's job, but there are important guidelines. It is not necessary to intervene in every conflict. If supervisors involved themselves in every conflict, they would likely create more of them because it would send a message that employees

**instance? Can you offer guidelines for deciding when to take control of a situation and step in?**

need not cooperate, compromise, or work out power struggles with each other. These are relationship skills that can be undermined by the authority possessed by a manager. A better tactic is monitoring what is taking place. So, when should you intervene? Intervene when the issues are disruptive to the work environment or affect others. Hold employees responsible for resolving conflicts. If you are unsure and would like some guidance, reach out to the EAO. You may also decide to speed up resolution by referring employees for additional help.

**I have an open-door policy. I let my employees know they can come to me at any time to share concerns or problems. I rarely get visitors; so, this is a sign everything is going well, correct?**

**Well, maybe.** An open-door policy encouraging workers to visit and discuss issues and concerns requires more than simply an open door. You must also have a psychologically safe workplace. A psychologically safe workplace naturally encourages employees to approach you and take advantage of what you are offering. They do so because they are confident they will not be rejected or punished for admitting a mistake, bringing a complaint, asking a question, or offering a new idea. Help employees feel respected, accepted, and comfortable by modeling this to others. The bottom line: How you interact with employees outside your office will determine whether they will walk through your open door later.

**I referred my employee to the EAO because of ongoing attendance issues. He didn't go and insisted no personal problems were to blame. What should I have said to win this argument? (He never went.)**

**There is no need** to argue or verbally joust with an employee who refuses an EAO referral. Has your employee's attendance improved since your discussion? Watch for improvement and then recurrence of the problem. This is a common pattern with personal problems that interfere with performance. The urgency felt by your employee resulting from the confrontation may have been enough to create positive changes in his behavior. If attendance remains good, consider your confrontation a success. Ultimately, your human resources manager may advise a disciplinary consequence for continuing problems. Reach out to the EAO for additional support about your concerns.

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## NOTES