

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



I have moved up rapidly in my career and fear that I am not prepared for so much responsibility so quickly. I should be, but it does not feel that way. My big worry is being at a meeting and senior management suddenly realizing I am not qualified for this job!

An employee took her own life a few weeks ago. Everyone was in total shock. There was no warning, yet many of us believe some clue could have been missed. The EAO was great, met with us, and offered guidance. Is there anything left for me to do this many days later?

If an employee had an alcohol problem, I think I would know it. That is why I am so surprised that one of my employees was admitted to a detox unit over the weekend.

Your fears may be normal in the face of a rapid rise in your career. Many people with fears similar to yours have discovered nothing came of them despite the anxiety they often felt. The collection of symptoms you describe is sometimes called “impostor syndrome.” Don’t panic. Talk to the EAO, and allow professionals there to guide you in gaining relief. Be prepared to share more about your concerns, career path, supervisor relationship, and specific fears. Impostor syndrome is an internal sense of fear, not based on reality. The impostor syndrome can be exacerbated by a difficult relationship with the boss or peers, or by a true shortage of skills, but rarely by the inability to perform the job or rapidly learn it.

The death of a coworker is always a shock, and it’s worse when it is unexpected. “Grief leadership” describes the manager’s role or that of anyone who leads with organizing, communicating, memorializing the employee, interacting with the family, and dealing with logistics of the deceased’s personal effects. Every employee is different in how they manage grief, and none of it is predictable. Be direct, and let employees know you recognize this fact, and encourage them to use the EAO, at any time. Listen for complaints of sleeplessness, diminished appetite, and intrusive thoughts about the deceased. Allow some freedom for employees to gather and process the loss when you see these groups spontaneously appear. No matter what, you are a role model to your employees. They are highly cognizant of how you act and respond to an incident of this nature. Do not hesitate to reach out to the EAO for your own support.

Many employees with alcohol problems may not drink on the job.

Instead, they drink after work, on weekends, or in the mornings prior to work, or they experience binges you will never witness. Family members do witness such events, however, and a crisis at home may have led to the admission of your employee in this case. Perhaps DUI led to the crisis. Your employee could have perfectly acceptable performance at work yet still have domestic problems caused by alcoholism. Like most people, you understand alcoholism from a limited

This employee never drinks at work and his work performance is outstanding. I'm stumped.

point of view, because misconception and misinformation about the disease is pervasive. It is easy to decide that anyone who does not fit into that view is without a problem. Don't respond to your employee with disbelief upon his return. Instead, respond with support.

I know about emotional intelligence, and its importance in workplace communication and in maintaining productive relationships, but how do I know if I have issues or gaps in this soft skill? Is there a test? Can the EAO help improve my EI?

There are many resources online that discuss emotional intelligence, test it, and promote various resources for improving it. A simple quiz and discussion about emotional intelligence for supervisors is found at the resource links below. One is in the Harvard Business Review, and the other is from Workforce Magazine. Use the information to test your emotional intelligence and learn how to improve it. Your desire to know more about your emotional intelligence shows your appreciation for self-awareness. Self-awareness is the most important skill to consider when examining emotional intelligence. If your EQ test points to areas where you think you need help, bring this information to the EAO for a discussion.

Sources: www.hbr.org/2015/06/quiz-yourself-do-you-lead-with-emotional-intelligence. You will find a good discussion about how supervisors can improve emotional intelligence at <https://www.workforce.com/2018/12/07/leaders-improve-emotional-intelligence>.

I have been a supervisor for 23 years. I realize that during that time I may have had employees who have struggled with depression. I am not familiar with the symptoms. Is this something the EAO can help me with so that I can provide better support to my employees?

Depressed employees can remain hidden because stereotypical views of depression do not match what most people see. Depressed persons are not necessarily sad, weepy, slumped at a desk, or looking down in the dumps. More typically, those with major depression experience feelings of emptiness that don't go away. They may exhibit extreme irritability over seemingly minor things, suffer with anxiety, restlessness, or anger issues, or may simply not want to participate in activities others enjoy. They may focus on past unsettling events, things that have gone wrong, and their failures. About 17 million adults nationwide suffer with major depression. The good news is that depression is highly treatable. The medical community has worked hard to help the general public understand that depression is not something people can snap out of with encouragement from friends who tell them to cheer up. We all experience sadness, but major depression is a mood disorder. To learn more and identify ways to support your employees, you may reach out to the EAO for a management consultation. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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