

# FrontLine Supervisor Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2019



**Employee Assistance Office**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**Q. An employee complained to me that their supervisor was harassing and bullying them. I didn't take action, because I felt the first step was to have them confront their supervisor. I am ready to step in, but isn't this inappropriate until they try to resolve the issue with their supervisor first?**

A. In years gone by, your approach may have been commonly recommended. However, in today's world of work, not taking action after being informed of offensive and hostile behavior can be viewed as a failure to act and negligence. Likewise, procrastination or putting off investigating the matter can be seen as apathy. Policies support employees going to the next level of management when lodging complaints. It's better to ask, "How do I act now in order to get a fair resolution regarding this incident?" Is there a role for the EAO? Yes. The employee should be offered support. EAPs reduce risk in organizations, and helping employees talk through any sort of emotionally upsetting incident is one way they do it.

**Q. I am trying to get my employees to buy into the mission and vision that I have for our work unit. I have a couple employees who are not cooperative. Their skills are acceptable, but they complain and are often negative. Can I refer them to the EAO?**

A. A wide spectrum of behaviors constitutes job performance. These entail quality of work as well as attitude and conduct on the job. If it is consistent with your performance evaluation and review process, consider incorporating measurable ways of evaluating attitude, cooperation and enthusiasm so they are meaningful in the evaluation. Often these performance factors are not well defined. Why not define what they mean before the evaluation period? You will discover that this is a powerful approach if you try it. If a positive attitude is desired, what demonstrates it? What does not? A thesaurus is helpful for finding action words for your definition. Be fair about applying these measures to everyone. You should see attitudes change because you have now properly linked attitude to performance. If behavior does not respond to your corrective approach, then consider use of the EAO. Also remember to consult with your HR along the way.

**Q. One of our employees is quick to get angry. It's scary. It includes getting red in the face and shaking. Some coworkers think this is funny. Frankly, I am a little nervous. If they had a personal crisis, could they "go off"? Should I be concerned?**

A. You have enough information to document this situation and be rightfully concerned about it. Consult with the EAO and discuss an approach that will support a successful intervention and EAO referral. The EAO will role-play with you the best approach. Be sure to talk to your employee in private. You don't have to wait until the next incident. It will be helpful to have clear examples of the behavior that is concerning, its impact on others and work productivity and what you would like changed. Certainly don't ignore the next opportunity. Your employee likely has keen awareness of their explosive style because others outside of work have either remarked about it or been victims of it. Coworkers should be discouraged from finding this behavior as a source of entertainment, including taunting the worker.

**Q. No one wants a cranky supervisor. Sometimes my mood is not the most pleasant. Are there any tricks or techniques for improving my mood so I can enjoy work more and engage with employees more effectively?**

- *Moods are related to subtle negative "self talk."*
- *Your mood can change as you change this inner voice script.*
- *You will notice an improved effect with practice.*

A. There are techniques for changing your mood. A frequent need to improve your mood could be a sign of depression or another medical condition. In this case, visit the EAO for an assessment to see whether there are other steps worth considering. Quick tips: 1) Exercise regularly. It will influence your mood to keep it more positive. 2) Feel an undesirable mood coming on? Go for a 10-to-15-minute walk outside or in a new environment. 3) Sit quietly for five minutes and imagine some activity you experience great pleasure in doing, such as fishing, gardening, hiking, or playing with children. This will influence a more positive mood, and it helps you keep life in perspective. Moods are related to subtle negative "self-talk." The mood can change as you change this inner voice script. You will notice an improved effect with practice. Visit the EAO if you remain concerned about the need to alter your mood, chronic feelings of irritability, or a communication style that does not facilitate a positive relationship with your employees.

Have you heard of our online, self-guided resource called **SilverCloud**? It is free and accessible to anyone with a NetID

Sign up or read more [here](#).

**Q. Next week I have to dismiss an employee who is currently an EAO client. I am very apprehensive about it. Can I use the EAO to talk about my feelings and process my concerns? If I become a client, will this put the EAO in a difficult or untenable position?**

A. The EAO is available to you, as it is to any employee, to discuss your concerns about the anticipated event. Your meeting is confidential, and the EAO's focus will be on helping you with your concerns and apprehension about the event. The EAO will not concern itself with the legitimacy of the planned action or with your employee's issues. To do so would sabotage the EAO mission. If you go to the EAO to obtain help for yourself, the consultant will focus on you. Employee assistance consultants are adept at detaching from the emotional concerns of other cases in the organization, many of which might be linked, so they can focus on the employee in front of them. This is a skill and an art that makes the employee assistance profession truly unique.



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