

Frontline Supervisor

July 2019

Q. There is usually a lot of tension when I conduct annual reviews. If employees are surprised by the results or if their scores are less than they imagined they would be, I often face hostility and anger. How can I reduce this tension?

A. Meet with your employees at the beginning of the year and discuss with them what they would like to achieve in the coming year, along with other measures of performance consistent with the goals of your work unit and the department as a whole. These goals should be achievable and measurable and include defined criteria for outstanding performance. Meet several times during the year and coach employees toward success. Ask employees each time, during these meetings, how they would grade themselves against the performance criteria they set. Additionally, ask about tasks they are most excited about and when possible, give them more opportunities to engage in that work. At year's end, you should see far less angst at performance review time, more satisfied workers, and higher levels of achievement that benefit the department.

Q. My employee went into treatment after they were informally referred to the EAO for attendance problems. They have a severe opioid addiction and left treatment against medical advice after about a week. The employee still seems to be doing well. I worry that this won't last. Is there anything I should do?

A. Meet with the EAO to discuss your role in monitoring your employee's performance and also learn about the symptoms of a relapse related to opioid addiction that may be exhibited at work. Although the EAO will not share confidential information, you can learn about signs and symptoms of relapse that you can document, if needed. Absenteeism is the original problem you spotted, but others may include poor coordination, drowsiness, nausea, and slurred speech. In this situation, relapse is possible since the employee displays a lack of motivation for treatment. If uncertain about next steps, consult with Human Resources.

Q. I am a second shift supervisor. Two employees recently got in to an argument while at work and there were no witnesses. Both are blaming the other. I also have a second job so I have difficulty reaching out to the EAO during regular business hours. What should I do?

A. We have good news! Our new EAP partner, LifeMatters, is available during any shift, day or night. Connect with LifeMatters about managing conflict and providing effective feedback. You will be able to consult with a master's level counselor/consultant who is familiar with workplace dynamics and able to offer effective approaches to address this situation.

Call 1-800-634-6433,

Text "Hello" to 61295,

mylifematters.com,

Password: Bucky2 (supervisors), Bucky1 (employees)

Q. I want to be a firm supervisor when necessary as well as a nice guy my employees admire. I think most supervisors feel the same way, but I find myself correcting employees more often than I praise them. How can I increase my positive interactions?

A. Establish communication habits to use daily with employees that help you improve your interactions

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and grow your reputation with them. When approaching an employee for any reason, lead with something positive so they do not learn to associate your presence with correcting performance, a negative interaction, or other painful exchange. Ask employees for their solutions to problems, and treat them like professionals, regardless of the position they hold. Intentionally interact with your employees when things are going well—get out of your office so you aren't seen as a one-person fire department only interacting when problems arise or things go badly. Participate in small talk; use these moments to learn about your employees' needs. Praise their past achievements, not just the ones you witness on the job. Finally, look for roadblocks to their success. Pay attention to what is impeding performance, and work cooperatively to address.

Q. I read that great leaders are eternal optimists, along with many other traits. I would like to be more optimistic in my leadership style. Am I able to change my outlook with help from the EAO? I realize how powerful this can be for employees, so I am open to whatever it takes.

A. Yes, you can learn to be optimistic. It starts with understanding the value of optimism for your work unit. Optimistic leaders exude positive energy because their attitude is one of hope and confidence about the work unit's direction and success of its goals. The good news is that optimism is a habit of thinking, acquired by changing a few beliefs, practicing new skills, and seeing the results from doing so. For example, you can learn the habit of challenging negative thoughts. You can also learn how to focus more on the solution to a problem than on the negative ramifications of it. And you can act and behave optimistically—even if you don't feel like it—and then observe the positive results for yourself and others. These exercises and more will, over time, flip the switch to help you practice a more optimistic leadership style. Discuss your goals with the EAO, journal your results, and watch the positive effects on those you lead. Also, check out [Silvercloud](https://hr.wisc.edu/well-being/silvercloud/), (<https://hr.wisc.edu/well-being/silvercloud/>) for a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) exercise to challenge negative thinking and tools for improving your outlook.