



THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource -- Employees

Q. How do I motivate an employee to give more to the work unit? He has been with us 17 years, and I think he has gotten used to a simple satisfactory level of performance. However, I think it is below his true potential. He'd probably put up a lot of resistance to change.

- ❖ Encouraging an employee to demonstrate more motivation and initiative can be a delicate task, but it is the primary role for any supervisor, so knowing what works and what's "state of the art" is essential. In other words, don't reinvent the wheel. Start with a candid conversation. Failing to help employees improve usually starts when you miss this step. Discuss performance and potential and rely on your observations and belief in his capabilities. Dive into this topic. Link these things to his aspirations and goals. He almost assuredly has some, or at least imagines a few despite his non-action; this is true for almost everyone, despite their non-action. Draw these out. State your expectations in a positive way and what you believe success for him looks like, but also point out opportunities for growth and advancement. Get agreement on a few changes and begin. Offer feedback frequently, recognize improvements, and offer training and new learning experiences to complement his development of new skills and knowledge. Be sure to use your HR resources as well.

Q. After a small truck accident, my employee admitted to smoking pot before I asked. He also shared a bunch of personal problems affecting him, so I made an EAP referral instead of testing him. I felt we were past the need for a test because of his honesty. Was this a mistake?

- ❖ You should act on the requirements of your organization's drug testing policy, which may include a referral to the EAP or other appropriate administrative action. Many safety and risk issues come with your decision, which include not knowing if other substances are involved, the inability to do follow-up testing, risk of public and associated legal jeopardy, and lack of leverage linked to job security that naturally creates greater urgency to remain in appropriate treatment if recommended by the EAP. The most common reasons supervisors ignore drug testing policies are to avoid straining the relationship with the employee, losing a worker and downtime, related scheduling problems, administrative/HR requirements, a fear that the supervisor will be perceived as hostile, and conflicts with labor representatives.

Q. I'm reluctant to utilize the EAP for supervisory consultation because I'm concerned that it could be perceived as a reflection on my skills and abilities, despite reassurances from management that it won't have a negative impact. How can I feel more comfortable?

- ❖ Feeling reluctant to use the EAP for supervisory consultation is not unusual. Realize, however, that consultative help may be the key to resolving a serious behavioral issue with a high-risk employee someday. Keep in mind that EAP consultations are confidential and that they can be conducted over the phone. View seeking EAP assistance as a proactive step for personal and professional growth. It demonstrates a commitment to improvement and learning. If you still feel uneasy, have an open conversation with your supervisor about their thoughts concerning an EAP consultation. Realize that your company culture and values are in line with helping employees and preserving human resources, as demonstrated by their investment in an EAP.

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Q. I've been working in the restaurant industry for 35 years. It has a late-night "after-work drinks" culture, but after one employee's auto accident on the way home, I have decided not to attend these sessions. Should I encourage others to stop this practice, despite negative effects on morale?

- ❖ It would be appropriate not to attend these after-work drinking sessions. An after-work drinks culture can create social pressure to participate in drinking activities, potentially excluding individuals who choose not to drink or even worse, apply pressure on those in recovery from alcohol misuse. As a result, these drinking occasions can contribute to feelings of isolation, alienation, or discomfort among employees and may negatively impact workplace morale and cohesion. Many courts have weighed in unfavorably on employers and held them liable for alcohol-related incidents or accidents that occur during or after work-related gatherings. Meet with your employees to see if there is another venue for after-work socializing with less risk to you and the organization.

Q. Is it appropriate for a supervisor to tell an employee "You must go to the EAP because of your job problems, issue, or circumstances"?

- ❖ One of the core tenets of EAPs is that use is voluntary. You risk reducing the attractiveness of an EAP to the work population when your wording is used and then misinterpreted by the employee to mean that it is involuntary. Many employees under duress may describe their experience in unfavorable terms if they feel coerced to participate in the EAP. The EAP functions as a "program of attraction." To protect this dynamic, reduce risk, and safeguard its value, it is better to say "I [or we] are required to make a formal referral to the EAP because of the circumstances..." Your referral in this context is more likely to be viewed as voluntary or as an accommodation in the event a personal problem is affecting work performance or conduct. Doing so will not preclude any necessary action if the employee decides not to accept an offer of help and job problems continue. In the same regard, always view referral to the EAP as a positive and constructive opportunity, not a punishment, and display an attitude that reflects this fact.

Q. I've noticed over the years that employees who are more likeable as people tend to get more positive performance evaluations. I think many supervisors are not aware of their lack of objectivity in evaluating the performance of people they like. Why does this happen?

- ❖ This is called the "halo effect." This is a bias where a positive impression of a person in one area (i.e., liked for being charismatic and jovial) leads to an overall positive perception of that person. In the workplace, an employee who fits the above description might get a higher performance evaluation than they deserve because the halo effect influences how the supervisor perceives and evaluates the employee. The risk of being unaware of this dynamic is that the supervisor will be accused of playing favorites, not giving enough feedback, or overlooking errors. Even worse, this can affect performance and pay raises that appear discriminatory. The solution is to use objective criteria for evaluations and, more importantly, to conduct them regularly because not doing so can lead to biases and potentially to risks of the halo effect.



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