

# Frontline Supervisor



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■ **Is all the talk we hear about workplace stress overblown, or is there something to it? After all, the workplace has always been stressful. Things should be better with all the technology options, right? What does the research say?**

According to Eastern Kentucky University, organizations spend about \$300 billion annually for health care and missed days due to workplace stress. The Centers for Disease Control defines workplace stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the employee. In a survey of 26,000 U.S. workers, 25% of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives, 54% said stress had caused them to argue with people close to them, and 60% said they would prefer to choose a new career altogether. Leading causes of stress are workload (48%), people issues (28%), and juggling work/personal life (20%). Organizations that recognize the impact of stress on employee productivity and make an effort to relieve stressed employees are the most successful. If you can relate to these issues, utilization of the EAO is strongly encouraged. (Feb. 2016, Infographic, <http://safetymanagement.eku.edu/resources/infographics/work-related-stress-on-employees-health/>)

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■ **My employee complains about a coworker who asks too many personal questions, such as “What did you do this weekend?” “What about Friday night?” “Who do you socialize with?” etc. Should I intervene?**

**Your employee can** be coached to communicate that these personal questions are unwanted. If the questioning continues, other actions can be considered to make the behavior stop. Most employees read “social cues” well and after one round of such questions without the anticipated responses would give up fast. This is normal social interaction, and all of us must acquire these skills so we can interact civilly with each other. However, some employees for a variety of reasons are less adept at knowing when they are violating these norms and going over the line. They require a clearer message. Consider a supervisor referral to the EAO as part of your interventions strategy should the behavior continue.

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■ **My employee is in pain when he bends over or gets out of a chair. We avoid giving additional assignments to him. This is a medical issue, so is an EAO referral appropriate?**

**There are several** reasons to consider recommending that your employee visit with the EAO. However, the first step is to have your employee work with Human Resources. The EAO can provide help with ancillary problems associated with the condition and the workplace, relationship stress in the office, secondary problems the condition has created at home, a need for general support, pursuing ideas the employee may have to help cope with the condition at work, and other problems still unknown. The EAO will offer encouragement and connect with

referral sources to help ensure effective treatment or resolution of other problems. This is a good example of how employees can get help with problems that at first glance may not appear to benefit from EAO assistance.

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**■ My employee does not like her job, but she is good at it. I don't have another position for her, and she doesn't want to quit. Is there a way to help her feel more joy in her position?**

**There are several** things that you can do that might help your employee. Try helping her set goals during the coming year so she can look forward to some meaningful accomplishments. Find ways of rewarding her for steps along the way. Come up with different things she can do that will allow her to gain new skills and abilities. Think in terms of giving her more responsibility in the office, not necessarily more work. More responsibility is a powerful reward for employees because it influences how people feel about themselves. Consider a referral to the EAO for consultation about career and personal issues.

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**■ I am feeling burned out. I am exhausted, apathetic, and frustrated. Should I go to my boss first or visit the EAO for answers on how to get out of this state of mind?**

**Whether you approach** your boss or the EAO is your decision, but here is how the EAO can help: 1) Assess the degree to which burnout is affecting your physical health (a medical referral may follow). 2) Identify the ways in which burnout has affected your work-life balance, with the goal of planning a return-to-wellness strategy, particularly with regard to mental health and well-being. 3) Offer suggestions for intervention strategies outside of work that can help you return to a more fully functioning state of engagement with your organization. 4) Help you examine on-the-job interventions, some of which may require discussion with your boss in order to implement them. 5) Follow up with you to facilitate, monitor, and help you implement your return-to-wellness plan.

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## NOTES