

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



Employee Assistance Office (EAO) – 608-263-2987 – [www.eao.wisc.edu](http://www.eao.wisc.edu)

■ **I do not like to micromanage my employees, but at least two of them won't finish their work in a timely manner unless I am directly involved in what they do. If I refer them to the EAO I am afraid things will get worse before they get better. So now what?**

■ **How do I correct an employee's bad attitude?**

**My employee has no job issues, but I am concerned that he may return to absenteeism problems and angry mood swings everyone was seeing two weeks ago. Is it too late to make a supervisor referral to the EAO? Also, this same pattern happened about six months ago.**

**Rather than refer your employees to the EAO now, consider visiting the EAO yourself.** The employee assistance professional can help you find a way to make the changes you seek and can coach you in how to detach from these employees. Micromanaging has been noted as a key complaint in surveys and research on employee morale; although supervisors are frequently blamed for micromanaging, some employees invite this type of relationship because they prefer it and feel anxious when not closely supervised, and may avoid promotional opportunities that require independence. Micromanaging forces employees to be dependent. In turn, the supervisor feels secure that work is getting done the way he/she would do it.

**Asking how to** help correct an employee's bad attitude is similar to asking how to resolve back pain. The next step is "Tell me more." Most supervisors will complain about an employee with a bad attitude at some point in their career. Typically, the description entails a negative and cynical communication style, disagreeable nature, suspicious view of management's motives, or someone whose statements consistently undermine morale. Attitude problems require good documentation. Many employees with attitude issues have something valuable to say about a needed change, and often it is a mistake to see them as entirely unreasonable. A supervisory consult with the EAO is recommended to provide support in getting at the root of any legitimate complaints.

**No, it is not too late** to make a supervisor referral. Good documentation is important. If you are unsure about how to word documents, consider consulting with your Human Resources office. What you say and how you say it are also important, so consider discussing an effective delivery with the EAO. The EA professional can also help you to identify key points to include in a constructive confrontation.

You have a clear rationale for your meeting with the employee. Despite not meeting with him two weeks ago, you can still share your observations of the pattern that has developed and clarify your expectations.

---

■ **I often see references to the importance of ‘being yourself,’ ‘being authentic,’ and ‘being a real person’ as a skill for supervisors. What does this actually mean?**

**Being yourself**, being genuine, or being ‘real’, all refer to the same thing — authentic leadership. The goal in this dynamic in supervision is to increase productivity by establishing optimal relationships. The awareness is to be professional and to balance this with approachability. The opposite is a supervisor who is detached and physically and/or emotionally remote. Balance is a learned skill. Supervisors vary widely in their ability to do this. Being authentic is being purposeful, in order to better understand employee strengths and weaknesses, personality, and working style. This leads to improved relationships and facilitates a better working environment where employees are motivated to put forth their best effort.

---

■ **In the upcoming new year, I am determined to improve the level of respect employees show each other in our organization. Beyond policies and work rules, what is a key strategy to positively influence change?**

**Maintaining a respectful** workplace is a growing concern for all, but what many people do not realize is that much disrespect is not premeditated. Instead, it is sometimes reflex, stress, fear, and the influence of personal biases. Supporting a work culture where employees actively discourage disrespectful behavior toward each other by pointing it out as it happens is a powerful change strategy. It’s often helpful to develop communication ground rules to foster a respectful and collegial workplace. Contact the EAO if you’d like to discuss such an approach.