

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



Employee Assistance Office (EAO) – 608-263-2987 – www.eao.wisc.edu

■ **I have a personality clash with an employee. I am struggling to practice emotional detachment, but I think supervisors must be careful with personality clashes.**

You are right about the need to be cautious and avoid something called “social undermining.” This refers to any behavior or attitude toward your employee with the goal of sabotaging and curtailing that person from advancing, achieving, or being recognized for what he or she accomplishes. Hindering success is the distinguishing feature of this behavior. Use the EAO to objectively assess your attitude. You may discover certain elements of your employee’s work style or personality that create anxiety for you. This may be attributed to feelings such as envy, jealousy, fear, and perhaps disappointment in your own achievements. These sorts of issues can be addressed. The EAO is an excellent resource for such a purpose.

■ **I could use some help in giving feedback to employees I supervise. I have heard of a technique called the ‘Feedback Sandwich’, have you heard of this example?**

Giving critical feedback to someone in order to change behavior is a delicate process. If it's done properly, however, the recipient will take the feedback positively and good results will follow, naturally! One very effective way to do this is to “sandwich” the coaching inside other, positive statements: 1) Identify the positive, 2) present the facts, and 3) give a bright outlook. Here’s an example: *You really did an excellent job with that ‘Treating People Fairly’ essay - everybody has been very impressed. In the future, it would be better to avoid naming people that haven't accepted all the methods you outline. It's great that you put so much thought into this and a lot of people are going to benefit from it!* This is just one approach that may provide help. Why not contact your EAO for others.

■ **What are the best ways to help employees feel appreciated and motivated if there is no extra money to improve pay?**

More money often does not have a lasting impact, but the following will: 1) Periodically comment on an employee’s performance in front of others, especially if the audience includes people the employee looks up to or feels are important. 2) Keep the employee aware of and involved in organizational matters that concern his or her job. 3) Keep your eyes open for things the employee does well and make a positive remark about them. (*This is called “catching the employee doing something right.”*) Use the same time to ask

your employee how things are going, and whether he or she needs anything from you to do his or her job. 4) Give an assignment or project that by its nature shows how much you trust the employee with something important or significant. These four strategies combined will help an employee to feel appreciated more than almost any other approach.

- **We hear a lot about how much anxiety employees experience because of work demands, technology, resource constraints, and our culture. Supervisors aren't experts on anxiety, but what can we do to help?**

Anxiety encompasses an array of mental health conditions, but supervisors are most likely to encounter a mixture of mild depression and anxiety disorders. Although distressing, they may not be deep-rooted conditions requiring long-term treatment. These include being worried or fearful about the future, facing work/domestic life and caregiver challenges, contending with financial stress, poor sleep, strain in personal relationships, and the inability to concentrate at work. Dependability issues may exist. You may see low mood or sadness, or may hear about poor sleep and appetite. You may witness fits of irritability, poor concentration, and forgetfulness. Headaches may be common, and aches and pains may be voiced. Heart palpitations, restlessness, and being “keyed up” and “on edge” may also be evident. As these symptoms emerge, encourage use of the EAO for yourself and your employee. Always emphasize confidentiality, and forget trying to talk an employee out of being anxious — it doesn't work.

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- **I don't think I should reject an employee who brings a personal problem to me. There needs to be some recognition and processing of the problem for a few minutes. I think this increases the chance of the employee accepting an EAO referral later when it is recommended.**

You're right, you should not reject an employee who musters the courage to come to you with a personal problem. This would decrease the likelihood of an EAO referral being accepted. Here's one approach: 1) Listen and acknowledge what is being shared, 2) Reflect what you heard or summarize the details (e.g., “So, the bottom line is that your landlord is forcing you to leave and you have nowhere to go?”). 3) Set the stage for referral using this logical path: (e.g., “Beth, a lot of personal information is needed to help solve this problem. As your supervisor, I am not qualified to offer the best next steps. Can I help you arrange an appointment to see the EAO?”). 4) Allow the employee to phone without delay, while motivation is high.