

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ There are many important issues in our society, so why is it that our EAO doesn't take a strong advocacy position on issues such as political, economic, racial, and social justice? People respect our EAO, so I think they could be powerful players in influencing change.

■ What are the most important skills for developing employees into strong team players? Can the EAO be an effective resource for me in acquiring these skills, whatever they may be?

■ I read online that employees who experience a lot of stress on the job have a higher risk of stroke. How can I help alleviate this risk as a supervisor? Frankly, I could see it happening with

The EAO must remain “an office of attraction”. A promotional principle that states utilization and attraction to the EAO will remain highest and benefit the most people by remaining neutral and avoiding positions of advocacy for causes that could unwittingly alienate or push away any would-be users. This dynamic is crucial to understanding the powerful role the EAO plays in our organization. The EAO is apolitical, neutral, and noncontroversial. We do not take sides in management/employee disputes, which would risk alienating large groups of the workforce. By remaining neutral, we are able to be of help to all of our organization's population.

Relationships are your most important “tool” for helping people grow into productive and satisfied employees. Being a competent reviewer and evaluator, along with knowing how to provide feedback, are the skills you seek. To do these things well: 1) Create an environment where employees expect feedback. 2) Train employees to do self-assessments well so they challenge themselves. 3) Know what you want to measure, and don't keep it a secret. 4) Encourage your employees to come to you early with concerns, and give positive feedback and a welcoming attitude. Recognize that this is one of most powerful yet underappreciated dynamics of effective supervision. 5) Think about how you would like each of your employees to develop based on his or her temperament and skills. 6) Plan feedback, even if it's for a minute, so that it is given effectively and well-received. 7) Use the EAO to help you develop and enhance relational skills in any of the above areas.

The study you mention was huge. It analyzed six studies with more than 130,000 people who were followed for 17 years on three continents. It showed men with severe work stress were 22% more likely to have a stroke, and women were 33% more likely. When researchers classify stress, they focus on job characteristics involving time pressure, mental load, and coordinating burden. These are target stressors. Discuss ideas for reducing these

some of the employees in my work unit.

stressors with employees. Seek to discover how and where employees can have increased control over their work. The degree to which this can be done mitigates these factors. You may be surprised by the types of jobs that include severe pressure. Some are nurse aides, waitresses, and other service industry positions. Test your assumptions and ideas; encourage employees to use the EAO when you detect or learn of personal problems that compound the work stress they already experience.

<http://healthcare.utah.edu> [Search "job risk stroke"]

■ **I am a new supervisor and fear the responsibility of this job. I have the ability to do it, but how do I get past this anxiety I feel? Can the EAO help? How?**

Yes, the EAO can help. Contact the EAO and work with the employee assistance consultant to discuss your concerns. Fear of anything new is normal, but it appears you are also excited and thankful for the position. That will likely help you overcome your concerns. Two things are keeping your anxiety high. You haven't worked as a supervisor before, and being a supervisor is an important responsibility. You have visions of disaster that fuel your anxiety. The EAO will help you develop an action plan and suggest ways to practice detaching from fear associated with the job. One technique the EAO may teach you is how to stay in the moment and focus on what is in front of you rather than skip to the future and imagine negative outcomes. This is called "staying in the now." The EAO will also share other cognitive strategies or find additional resources to assist you.

■ **With cutbacks and layoffs happening within our organization, how can I make a difference to improve the work environment for my employees?**

Your workplace may be marked by significant anxiety, insecurity, and trepidation by employees whose productivity is a result of motivation driven fear, rather than what they might gain or achieve. In this environment, toxic relationships can flourish, with drama, infighting, and turf wars surfacing. As crises erupt, opportunities for change appear. At the supervisory level, you can work to prevent this by: 1) encouraging work-life balance; 2) keeping open communication among employees; 3) encouraging collaboration among employees; 4) recognizing humanistic and intangible forms of success; 5) encouraging information sharing and decision-making; and 6) communicating with the ranks. Avoid making decisions mysteriously in unexplained closed-door meetings.