

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ **I'm a concerned supervisor and want my employees to come to work every day enjoying what they do, and feel like I am measuring up to their expectations. How do the most successful supervisors accomplish this?**

Employees are resources to organizations, and because they are paid for what they do, a partnership or contract exists to provide them with benefits in exchange for work. Frequently, managers and business organizations get too stuck within this model trying to help employees feel motivated by looking to benefits, rewards, and tangibles to keep them happy and loyal to an organization. But this is only half of the picture. The other half is an effective relationship employees have within the organization. It is also part of the contract, although much of it or perhaps none is in writing. You're the closest representative of that relationship. Meeting employees' needs in this part of the loyalty equation requires things that are harder to produce for some managers. They include getting closer to the employee by offering coaching assistance for career goals, helping employees connect with mentors, giving them lots of feedback, and ensuring that no "trees" are growing between you and them by keeping communication channels open and demonstrating that you are empathetic to their needs.

■ **Should I pay attention to my hunches and "gut feelings" that tell me my employee is using drugs on the job? There are no signs or symptoms, but he acts like he is proud that he is getting away with something. It's unsettling. Perhaps my dislike of him is my problem.**

It's not unusual to periodically have suspicions about employees you supervise. Nearly all supervisors experience hunches or worries about the ulterior motives of employees from time to time. If consistent and ongoing, you could use some confidential discussion about them. Don't dismiss them yet, but meet with the EAO. Several outcomes could emerge from such a meeting. These could include gaining clarity on what is bothersome or perhaps validate your concerns. You may even discover signs and symptoms you have overlooked that could be documented and acted upon later. You could also learn more about yourself, and how and why you respond to your employee the way you do. The EAO will help you consider changes in your supervision style or perspective that could improve this relationship.

■ **How can the EAO help my employees with customer service stress?**

Consider surveying employees to see where their "pain points" are regarding customer service stress. This is a broad topic and could include burnout, physical demands, dealing with angry customers, training needs, resources issues, and pressure to meet management expectations versus customer satisfaction, or feeling unsure about one's role, performance review issues,

and more. A quick search for “types of customer service stress” can lead you to a good list. Use these to query your group, and consider meeting with the EAO to discuss how to best meet the needs of your group or individual employees. Retaining good customer service workers by helping them deal with stress is a smart move—and a cost-beneficial one that could help with the overall wellbeing of your staff.

■ **My employee complained to human resources about my bullying. I am not a bully, but I use humor with my employees, and I guess my dry humor didn’t sit well with this worker. How can I avoid this in the future?**

Bullying in the workplace is pervasive and is now viewed as a serious occupational hazard by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety. The 2017 survey on workplace bullying was released recently by the Workplace Bullying Institute. Forty percent of bullied targets are believed to suffer adverse health effects. The above reflects the serious human and economic costs of bullying. Although you were not found to be a bully, making employees the target of jokes can be intimidating and lead to a host of other employment-related complaints like harassment. Start with altering your communication style so you nurture more satisfying workplace relationships. Additionally, since you are desirous of having meaningful relationships with your employees, an EAO consult can be helpful.

■ **My employee reports concern about an individual believed to be a stalker. I am glad the employee came to me. Can you offer suggestions on managing this issue?**

Review your organization’s policy on violence in the workplace if one exists, to ensure that you follow established procedures. Meet with your manager or key managers and human resources to discuss the issue, and determine the safety concerns to address. Suggest that your employee contact the EAO for support and guidance. You’re smart not to ignore this complaint. Too frequently, stalking is perceived as just another personal problem like marital conflict or troubles with a teenager. Stalking is a serious crime with significant risk, especially for women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace and one out of eight homicides is from a stalker. Key issues to discuss include how to respond to restraining orders, whether other employees should be informed, the role of the police, etc.

NOTES