

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OFFICE (EAO) – 608/263-2987 – www.wisc.edu/eao

■ **I don't like workplace politics. I like to come to work, stay out of controversy, and go home. I also encourage my employees to watch out for politics. Is politics in an organization ever a good thing?**

Workplace politics is how decisions in business organizations are made using relationships, influence, and power. Workplace politics can be a stressful part of any work environment, but like conflict, politics is a normal occurrence in organizations. It is therefore better to understand and manage this phenomenon for positive change. Many people confuse politics with other problems such as gossip, unethical behavior, unfair distribution of resources, game playing, and manipulation. Any of these undesirable behaviors could be associated with workplace politics, but they don't have to be. Politics in the workplace can be a positive force for networking. As a result, materials, opportunities, and intangible resources can be obtained by way of influence and association with others when these needs would not otherwise be met. This is a valuable use of politics. This example of your employees interacting with the political environment to bring about positive change for the benefit of your work unit and improvement in productivity makes politics something to be appreciated rather than shunned.

■ **Is being "approachable" important for a supervisor? I keep an open-door policy. Doesn't this mean I am approachable?**

Approachability is a valuable strength for a manager and usually means he or she is an effective communicator. Being approachable increases the likelihood of reducing risk to the organization and solving problems sooner because employees are more willing to come to you with issues and concerns before they grow worse. Approachability is closely associated with two other skills—vulnerability (openness) and authenticity. Employees are naturally attracted to these personality traits, and they directly influence your reputation, likeability, and the appearance that you are approachable. Typically, these traits are also associated with warmth and patience and the willingness to respect employees' views, collaborate with them, and be a good listener. Do you struggle with any of these traits or skills? If so, there may be room to become more approachable. Your EAO can help because these skills can be taught or the traits can be acquired.

■ **I am a new supervisor. What myths and misconceptions about being a supervisor am I most**

It is good to have an awareness of the stereotypes, misperceptions, and falsehoods associated with the supervisor's role to avoid modeling them. Most fall into four broad areas. 1) The Dominating Personality (bossing people around, intimidating staff, instilling fear, and being loud); 2) The Overseer (being the sole planner, doing all the big thinking, delegating

likely to accidentally model and therefore get myself in trouble with my employees and management?

everything, and kicking back to watch it all happen); 3) The Easy Streeter (giving lots of kudos, keeping the troops happy, being a friend to all, and trusting that the skills of supervision will come naturally and you will now have less stress with no more hard work); and 4) The Stress Monster (always being available day or night, being a know-all-see-all, doing the most difficult tasks, being smarter than anyone you supervise, never making a mistake, and arriving early and staying late).

■ How can I help my employees find more meaning and fulfillment in their jobs? I think some of my employees feel their lives are slipping away because they can't pursue other occupational interests. Some are locked into retirement plans.

Your employees are no doubt thankful to have jobs and retirement plans, but any employee who feels unfulfilled will experience frustration. Everyone is exceptionally good at something, but not everyone has a job that plays to their strengths. Here are a couple ways to help. Encourage employees who demonstrate frustration to identify what things they love to do and then discover how their current job functions could be tweaked to meet those needs. The EAO can help your employees with this examination of needs. Another approach: Imagine having a frustrated accounting clerk—who really wants to be a school teacher—organize a money literacy event sponsored by your organization for grade-school children. This idea may improve job satisfaction, create publicity for the organization, and positively affect productivity. Many employees fear growing old and never having a job that will make a difference in the world. This need can sometimes be achieved in other ways. The task is to discover it.

■ I am experiencing ongoing stress. Recently I have felt a little detached from conversations and events. It is difficult to describe, but sometimes it's like I am only "half there," not really involved. It also feels like I am just going through the motions. Is this burnout?

A professional assessment is recommended to determine the cause of this symptom. Many people under stress and experiencing burnout complain of feeling "detached" from their surroundings. Things seem less real, even a little dream-like. This is known as depersonalization. It is a defense mechanism, but it is less commonly experienced as compared to others like denial, externalizing, and projection. Its purpose is to taper your response to stress in your environment, but this is not the way you should continue to function. You need be aware of your surroundings, especially when driving a car or operating machinery. You know something is not quite right, so with that information, turn to the EAO for an assessment. The EAO can help you determine if you are experiencing burnout, evaluate you for other symptoms, and get you to the right help.

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