

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **My employee tends to be stubborn and unable to see others' points of view. She is too blunt; for example, she'll say, "You're wrong!" rather than "I believe that...." She talks down to others. I corrected her, but any changes don't last. I think she is insecure. Would counseling help?**

■ **I view myself as a tolerant person, but I admit that I am not comfortable with text messaging as a workplace communication tool. Is this my problem, or do I need to "get with the times?"**

■ **My employee is very smart and capable, but this person is not producing the quality of work I expect. I'm starting to feel a little like a broken record**

Your employee has a habit of communicating with others that is difficult to change, but it's doable. There could be many reasons for her communication style, but your focus should be on correcting it, not guessing its cause. You need more leverage than simply fussing at her in return for short-term corrections. Consider holding her accountable by incorporating change in her performance reviews. Meet several times during the year to reinforce progress. Using this planned approach is important. Other leverage may include a corrective letter to create an impression and provide motivation for change. A supervisor referral to the EAO is also appropriate; EAO sessions could help her improve faster, reinforce progress and could make those changes last.

Text messaging is getting more attention in business literature as

"Generation Y" workers who are comfortable with instant message (IM) communication enter the workplace to find older peers or managers uncomfortable with it. Being open to change is valuable, but not every new convention requires you to adapt to it. Although learning to text message may have some useful business applications, it is appropriate to expect employees skilled in the technique to rely on conventional communication methods if those work best for your organization. The call to understand, adapt, change and get with the times are big stressors for managers and employees alike, but some things do not change. One of them is the need for effective relationships and good communication that will produce results. This is an argument for everyone, old and young alike, to be good communicators. The good news is that young people today are an upbeat, empowered, ambitious and eager-to-learn group of folks who value honesty. So you can anticipate their cooperation.

Typically, if your reasonable attempts to correct performance have not worked, that's a signal to consider a referral to the EAO. Before doing so, consider whether you have used appropriate management tools. For example, proper accountability is frequently overlooked by managers although they think it exists. Have you set up a procedure in which your employee is obligated to report decisions to you and justify those

harping on productivity. Completed projects continue to disappoint me. Is it time for a supervisor referral?

decisions and actions as they occur? Do you have a mutual understanding about the consequences of failure to meet certain defined outcomes? This is also called “transparency” in supervision. Negative feedback (and positive) should not follow only after the fact, but should be offered before decisions are made and undesirable outcomes are produced. Accountability and transparency in supervision relationships change the mindset of employees and for many are all that’s required to produce the results managers expect but never thought they’d see.

■ I want to be fair when giving assignments to employees, but I feel like I discriminate based on whether I trust them. Maybe it’s believability, authenticity, or realness—I can’t put my finger on it—but this difference among employees affects my judgment. What’s my problem?

Trusting your employees is a risk, but good leaders must learn to do it.

Each of your employees has unique skills and abilities, but you will not discover what they are until you test them with assignments that can reveal them. Some employees are more adept at unveiling who they are to others. Part of their appeal is an ability to be vulnerable and show authenticity. Others are just as competent, except they do not exhibit these qualities in their personalities. So the issue for you is clarity. Because you are not clear about who these employees are, your impulse is to trust them less. This gives you a clue to your next step, which is to engage more with them so they become less of a mystery to you. More trust will follow.

■ Employees who are “part of the group” seem much happier. Some employees avoid socializing with their peers. They rely solely on their performance to advance in the organization. I know it’s not fair, but social skills and competence are important. How can I help?

The reality is that social competence in the environment is important. When examined closely, employers more often choose to hire employees who have these abilities because they can help create an upbeat work culture and positively influence the bottom line. Although socializing, telling jokes, and bringing in the doughnuts are not essential duties, it is still appropriate to help your employee connect with peers. Some of this depends on your employee’s willingness to be more engaging. During reviews, if appropriate to your organization’s format, inquire as to how the person feels about his or her connection to the larger environment and with peers. Statements indicating a desire to be more a part of the social network will give you a sense of how far you can go in making recommendations. Remember, the EAO is always ready to help.

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