

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I've observed employees who have heavy workloads resisting organizational change even when they are able to finally share their work burden or give up work they complained about for years. Can you help me to understand this?**

**When employees** face organizational change, resistance is often observed, even if they personally benefit from it. This resistance is usually not evidence of employees having personal problems, and it is usually not cause for alarm. Much resistance to change can be prevented by providing opportunity for participation in the change process. Education is also an important factor. At a minimum, employees should understand that if organizational change calls for giving up something like job duties or prestige, changing an office location, or losing coworkers, then resistance can emerge. Even the loss of a familiar routine or pride in a specific task can create resistance or conflict. The common denominator, of course, is loss. It is not always possible to prepare employees for change, but your EAO can help or supplement organizational efforts in planning for change. This may include one-on-one counseling for groups of employees to help them examine personal reactions to change and loss, help them understand what's motivating resistance, and help them with insecurities that undermine acceptance of the organization's change goals. Talk to the EAO to learn more.

■ **What are common issues that interfere with a supervisor's motivation or desire to make a formal supervisor referral to the EAO?**

**Most supervisors** know that an employee can be referred to the EAO for formance, attendance, or conduct problems. Unfortunately, this does not ensure that a referral happens. Unfamiliarity with the referral process or uncertainty about what the employee's reaction will be to a formal referral can create hesitation and impede the referral decision. Not viewing the EAO as a positive management tool to correct performance can also reduce the number of supervisor referrals. Education and visibility of the EAO are important interventions to any of the above.

■ **Is it appropriate for me to ask the EAO for advice on how to best communicate with my employee? Although he has no performance issues, he is not easy to approach and**

**It is appropriate to** consult the EAO s to help you manage any relationship issues you experience with your employees. The EA professional might lead you to discover not only more effective ways of communication with your employee, but also what his behavior means. Furthermore, effective communication is the employee's responsibility as much as it is yours. If you assume that communication is solely up to you, you are eliminating a key measure of your employee's responsibility for interpersonal

**it is difficult to hold a conversation with him.**

effectiveness. Talk to the EAO to explore whether you struggle with assertiveness and how you can help your employee be more accountable for behaviors that clearly impede the ability of others to communicate with him. The EAO will help you gain a clearer perspective along with the practical help in communication that you seek.

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**■ I keep the EAO's business cards in my desk drawer. If an employee mentions a personal problem as an excuse for poor performance, I offer them a card rather than listen to excuses. I haven't had anyone take a card yet. Is it my approach or is it employee resistance?**

**Although it is clear** that correcting performance issues is your priority, it appears that you are not making effective use of the EAO as a management tool. The EAO service is not just for employees. It can also help you get from employees what you need: satisfactory performance. Employees who share their personal problems are not usually premeditating an excuse from accountability. They are looking for solutions. Try selling the solution more effectively, for their good and yours. True, it is inadvisable to discuss an employee's personal problems, but simply listening and being supportive can help. Discussing the EAO as a good resource rather than simply handing over the business card will help employees seriously consider making the call. You'll get what you need faster, and you may help an employee resolve a personal problem as well.

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**■ Can I create a work culture where employees are passionate and excited about what we do, or is this an accidental experience like "charisma" that is out of my control? I would love to know the secrets of having a high-energy group of happy folks on the job.**

**You can set the stage** for a passionate and positive work culture, but ensuring that it happens is less certain. There are accepted principles to consider, however. One commonsense idea is to hire passionate employees. (Their brilliance is important, but the energy they display is even more important.) Put them in key posts so they rub off on others. Use effective communication to help employees bond. Manage conflicts with efficiency, and you reap more positive outcomes from them. When difficult employees and employees with personal problems demonstrate performance issues, the EAO is a valuable resource. Passionate people in workplaces have fun because energy "spills" into spontaneity and authentic relationships. These relationships naturally translate into longer working hours. Be sure to recognize, praise, and reward those who go the extra mile. Keep your employees in touch with the big picture, the dream, and the goal "we're all aiming for." Finally, expect and promote a respectful workplace as relationships emerge and develop.

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## NOTES