

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **Many changes are affecting our organization, and employees complain often. What communication techniques can deflect some of this and encourage employees to take responsibility, cope, adapt, and accept the changes?**

Some employees will complain about change, while others will not. Forward-looking employees in the latter group may cope and adapt faster. Be empathic, but a reality check is also appropriate. Realize that accepting change usually includes a bit of denial, so some complaining can be expected. Let employees know you understand their fears and anxieties, but also say, “It is important for all of us to make a conscious decision that we will figure out how to face the difficulties ahead caused by change.” Show your strength. Say, “We’ll allow our survival instincts to turn on the creative juices so we spot solutions sooner and more clearly.” Send a message of expectation of self-reliance. This includes seeking EAO support, as needed. Encourage employees to have an attitude that demonstrates a focus on what is within their control and that letting go of what is not within their control is part of adapting to change.

■ **Can you give me a checklist of what I should remember to do after I make a formal referral of an employee to the EAO?**

The purpose of following up is to evaluate and monitor the improved performance of your employee. Consider the following: 1) Specify a timeframe regarding your expectations; 2) Schedule regular meetings to review performance with your employee after the referral; 3) Consult with the EAO and your HR Rep immediately if performance problems return or new ones emerge; 4) Expect satisfactory performance and if performance expectations are not met within the designated timeframe, consult with Human Resources regarding next steps.

■ **I am a new supervisor and see a lot of low energy among employees in my work group. There’s no excitement or enthusiasm for what they do. Something**

Avoid teambuilding or holding gripe sessions as they require trust in order to be successful. Instead, meet with each employee in a private meeting and ask how things are going. It’s the most direct route to discovery. Don’t be mysterious about your intentions. Conduct a few each day until you see everyone. Be up front and say you want to greet everyone individually and learn confidentially about important issues. Ask employees to bring proposed solutions, not just issues. You may notice employees perk up immediately. This results from employees telling

is not right, but no one is talking. How do I find out what's wrong?

their stories and feeling hopeful. Be cautious; this won't last unless you formulate a plan from what you learn to address issues. Ask management to give input and approval. Don't forget about the EAO. It can serve as a great sounding board and offer insights because of its unique role as an observer of organizational process.

■ If an employee had an alcohol problem, I think I would know it. That is why I am so surprised that one of my employees was admitted to a detox unit over the weekend. This employee never drinks at work and his performance is fine. I'm stumped.

Many employees with severe alcohol problems may not drink on the job.

Instead, they drink after work, on weekends, in the mornings prior to work or they experience binges you will never witness. Family members do witness such events, however, and a crisis at home may have led to the admission of your employee in this case. Perhaps DUI led to this crisis. Your employee could have perfectly acceptable performance at work yet still have domestic problems caused by alcoholism. Like most people, you understand alcoholism from a limited point of view, because misconception and misinformation about the disease is pervasive. It is easy to decide that anyone who does not fit into that view is without a problem. Don't respond to your employee with disbelief upon their return. Instead, respond with support.

■ Employees pick on each other in our workplace. Nastiness, irritability, passive-aggressive communication, negativity, intolerance, and gossip characterize the work environment. How can we begin to eliminate it?

You are describing a pattern of interpersonal abuse among employees.

Characteristically, this form of bullying behavior is emotional, verbal, and covert. It is fraught with many secondary risks, including damaging effects to morale, increased risk to safety, and lower productivity. Reducing these unacceptable behaviors, requires labeling them as such and having zero tolerance for them. Ongoing education and awareness is important and helpful in reducing them. It can be a challenge for leadership to identify these behaviors because they are frequently covert and almost indescribable. The key is being a manager who employees depend on for dealing with it. Your HR Rep can help you determine what language is helpful and effective in supporting documentation necessary to arrange a supervisor referral to the EAO.

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