

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **What can supervisors do to encourage employees to practice wellness? I know this is not a supervisor's responsibility; however, supervisors do have influence, and I think we should put it to good use to help people.**

■ **Why is change, even when it is a good change, such a difficult thing for employees? What can be done in advance to reduce resistance or conflict when a change is introduced?**

■ **I referred my employee to the EAO a year ago, but their recommendations were not followed at the time. My employee is in trouble with severe ab-senteeism issues, and**

**You can prompt** employees to be healthier without crossing boundaries.

Start understanding what constitutes healthy behaviors, and then spot opportunities to practice these and encourage others to do so too. Orient your personal leadership style to value wellness. For example, do you encourage taking work breaks? Does staff feel comfortable going for a walk or stretching at break time? Do you orient new employees to your personal philosophy of work-life balance and maintaining a healthy lifestyle? Can you permit flex time so employees can participate in wellness activities? Consider placing wellness topics, even for a few minutes, on the agenda for your meetings. Promote walking meetings, taking the stairs, ergonomically correct office furniture where feasible, and the recognition of employees who are making efforts to live healthier. Be consistent with any of these things and you will establish a “wellness culture” and see it catch on throughout the organization.

**Organizations have** experienced rapid change over recent decades—change prompted by advances in technology, the pressure of economics, international competition and more. Helping employees cope has generated significant discussion among workforce management professionals. Change may be good, bad, easy, difficult, desired, or undesired, but it is first and foremost often perceived as *a threat*. Threat in this sense means it challenges the status quo and the familiar. When planning for change, have a communication strategy so employees can consider how they will adapt, make decisions, consider the mental hurdles of acceptance, consider the reasons for change, and grow to appreciate how the change will ultimately be better for them. Your work unit and organization can thrive with positive change, but without communication and patience, many problems risk sabotaging your organization's goals.

**Put your organization's** interests first and make a decision based upon the circumstances. Prior refusal to participate in EAO recommendations and later seeking help under duress is quite common, especially with employees wrestling with severe behavioral/health problems. Although frustrating to management, this flight to help is usually viewed by the EAO as a positive sign and an indication that their cycle of denial was ending. You will need to work closely with your management/HR Rep

**just returned to the EAO. Should I go forward with the job actions we've planned or hold off?**

**■ I hear a lot about stress management techniques, but frankly, none of them work for me. What can a supervisor in my position do? I feel I am about one inch away from burnout. I could call the EAO, but doesn't that just mean more stress management techniques?**

**■ I am a newly hired supervisor and would like to build trust with my employees quickly. Can you offer any tips?**

around the absenteeism issues. Your referral to the EAO is designed to help the employee address what may be going on in their personal life which may be affecting their attendance.

**Managing stress** is not just about practicing exercises to reduce its effect.

Working with the EAO will allow you to develop a plan or approach to address the unique issues you face. You'll examine specific behaviors that impede your ability to manage stress or that make it worse, and be introduced to other behaviors designed to intervene. Anyone who faces stress copes with it somehow. These coping strategies are not necessarily conscious choices. They may simply be harmful or maladaptive reactions to circumstances. These behaviors may include overwork, denial of the stress, increased multitasking, or avoiding discussing problems, to name a few. With the help of the EAO, you'll be able to pull back the issues like peeling an onion, and discover new, healthier, and adaptive behaviors that will help you to manage stress effectively.

**You can't rush** trust, but here are a few tips to prevent setbacks. 1) Do what you say you are going to do. Employees have memories like elephants for promises made by supervisors. 2) Communicate frequently, not just when there is big news, good or bad. Communication is the only way employees will discover what you want them to know about you, so the more frequent, the better. 3) Act appropriately with employees, but avoid being reserved, aloof, remote, or a conformist. Let them see the real you, and use opportunities like birthdays or special occasions to express your sentiments to individuals. 4) When possible, do not harbor negative news and then drop it on employees at "the right time." Try to first prepare employees for what might be coming. 5) The more employees who see you and talk with you individually and in groups, the more trust will build. Many people in leadership roles who understand this principle are able to build trust and their reputations flourish as a result.

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## NOTES