

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I think I do a good job with documentation and correction memos. It's my primary way of communicating with employees regarding performance issues. Personal meetings are difficult to arrange and often must be rescheduled. Should I make a greater effort to meet, even if I feel that I am efficient already?**

■ **How can I use the employee assistance professional as a consultant? I refer employees to the EAO, but I am a little unsure about what the EAO can do for me regarding supervisor tips, process, problem solving, etc.**

■ **What are the most common bullying behaviors in the workplace? I would like to know what**

Effective documentation is an important skill for supervisors; however, good communication is an even more important skill to master. When you discover problems with employees, your most important goal is to resolve them. It's a common mistake among supervisors to remain at a distance from employees, send emails and documents, and call that communication. You can discuss problems this way, but solving them requires much more. A performance problem is a discrepancy between what you want from your employee and what you get. Typically there are many issues associated with performance discrepancies that written communication will not uncover. These include employee attitudes, skills, interference from others, organizational issues, and ineffective teamwork. Rolling up your sleeves and diving into the issues to improve productivity is what is really needed in addition to documentation. Resisting the temptation to communicate primarily within a digital world is your challenge.

When employees and managers think of the EAO, they usually think of solving employees' personal problems; however, EAOs offer much more. EAOs have unique relational advantages in organizations based upon their trustworthiness, patience, approachability, and listening skills. They gain these strengths through training and experience. EAOs can therefore consult with you on dozens of topics and concerns associated with behavior in the workplace. A few of these include: steps you can take to improve communication with your employees; simple coaching tips to help employees resolve conflicts; managing stress; how to attain goals; ideas for developing teams; constructive confrontation techniques; motivating and inspiring your employees; guidance on intervening to deal with nonproductive behaviors you may witness with employees; and facilitating positive work cultures.

According to one study, the most common bullying behaviors in the workplace include: falsely accusing someone of errors; staring at, glaring at, and nonverbally intimidating the person; discounting the person's thoughts or feelings, such as by saying "Oh, I can tell you're new here,"

they are so I am more likely to spot them or believe employees when they come to me with complaints.

saying “Duh,” or “Everyone knows that”; giving a coworker or subordinate the silent treatment; and making up rules on the fly. Other common bullying tactics include backstabbing, assigning undesirable work, and socially isolating the victim from coworkers. You can learn more about bullying behaviors from the EAO. Educating employees about bullying has a major impact on preventing it. As you can see, some of these behaviors are difficult to measure, but you’re right, knowing what they are will help you hear complaints with a more open mind and be less likely to minimize their significance.

■ I have an employee who won’t go to the EAO, or at least I don’t think this person has gone yet. I am considering giving assignments that will cause the employee to quit. Should I discuss this strategy with the EAO?

Although your question is one for legal and HR experts to respond to, by your own definition this would be mistreatment of your employee. It therefore sounds unethical or at least extremely risky. The EAO will not discuss this strategy with you because to do so would cross the boundary of advising you on administrative and disciplinary matters. It sounds as though you need some coaching on effective ways to manage this troubled employee and motivate him or her to accept a referral to the EAO based upon performance-driven intervention techniques. If an employee really wants to keep their job, there is usually a way to motivate the employee to visit the EAO voluntarily prior to being dismissed. Work with the EAO to find that strategy.

■ I admit to micro-managing my employees, but is it always a bad thing? What if the project is really important? I admit to not being able to control this problem, but I can’t let go of important things that I delegate to employees. How do I find a balance?

It appears you have doubts about the competence of the employees to whom you are delegating. You may have realistic concerns. Issues like micromanaging are not all black and white. Your task is to step back, identify the pattern of over managing, and experiment with pulling back to develop more balance in your approach. The EAO can support and coach you to be more successful. The hard costs of micromanaging are many; the most notable, of course, is being resented by your employees. That’s a big price to pay for the problem. The primary issues that drive micromanagement are usually mostly psychological. Either you don’t trust employees, are too caught up and overtaken by the details, live in fear of mistakes, or struggle with self-doubt. EA professionals have a high success rate with solving this problem.

NOTES