

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I have been a supervisor for 20 years and have heard the same complaints from employees about bosses over the years. I think many are excuses for performance issues, but what are the most common complaints? Perhaps it would help supervisors prevent these problems sooner.**

■ **I am an energetic person, and I have a positive personality, but I can't say it rubs off on my employees. Other than staying enthusiastic and sincere, how can I inspire employees to maximize their performance?**

■ **When I recently referred my employee to the EAO, the response was a complaint that I was not "being fair." It sounded pretty odd, since the EAO is a positive thing. The supervisor referral seemingly was viewed by**

**Complaints about** supervisors sometimes fall short of reality, but the more common ones include the following: "My boss has favorite employees, and they get the best assignments or are excused from undesirable assignments." "My boss doesn't seem to care about my problems." "My boss hasn't evaluated my performance in years and I don't know where I stand with the organization." "My boss has personality issues and experiences conflict with me and other employees." "My boss often avoids me, doesn't say hello, or doesn't acknowledge me." "My boss doesn't trust me with key assignments." And so on. When you conduct performance reviews, listen carefully. Inquire about how your employees feel about their job and their relationship with you. You'll quickly spot trouble points if you keep the above complaints in mind. If you find that some of these issues apply to you, you may want to contact the EAO for assistance.

**Assume that** each of your employees is capable of magnificent achievements. This will positively affect your attitude and interactions with them. Your current style of leadership is setting an example; however, good communication is also crucial. Let everyone know what's going on within the organization and the importance of their role in the big picture. Be realistic, but let employees know what awaits them personally and as a team for achieving goals. Also, consider checking your behavior. Mistrust, inability to adapt to change, disrespect toward employees, or a perception that you are not performing at your peak can be magnified by employees and provide fodder for chatter. This will undermine your goal of keeping employees engaged. Process your stress with other supervisors and the EAO, and develop ideas for nurturing your staff. This will reduce isolation and keep you energized.

**The reaction** you received is caused by a common yet preventable problem of misperception. Just as you would support employees taking advantage of any organizational resource, initiate discussions with them around the importance of the EAO and the special opportunity it affords employees. Not using the influence of your position to reinforce the positive nature of this resource will have the opposite effect. A natural tendency exists for employees to view the EAO only as a counseling resource, despite other organizational services offered. This perception of the EAO as a place to go with personal problems can fuel stigma and avoidance. Promoting the EAO as a desirable resource that is pro-people

**the employee as some sort of punitive step. What explains this reaction?**

and pro-organization requires active encouragement to change this perception. As a supervisor, you are in a unique position to promote this service. With that kind of support, the EAO will become an attractive resource, with correspondingly high utilization.

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**■ I have an employee who is shy and has always refused requests to speak in public. I have accommodated the employee's fear until recently, but it is now time to intervene, because it is part of the job description. Should I make a referral to the EAO now, or wait until the task is refused once more?**

**Meet with your** employee and discuss the nature of the position and its responsibilities. Be positive, hopeful, and supportive. Discuss how you have made allowances for their fear of speaking until now, but that going forward it will be an expectation of the position to make work-related presentations. If the employee wants to remain in the position, they will need to address this issue. Offer training or other resources that the organization can provide or support. Anticipate change and cooperation going forward. If change is not realized, make a formal EAO referral. The EAO may be able to help your employee learn new behaviors that focus externally on the social environment rather than internally on fear, anxiety, and social performance.

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**■ Our organization is trying to encourage employees to use less of the Internet for nonbusiness activities. What does the latest research say about these behaviors? Can the EAO help?**

**A recent research** report from Kansas State University found that about 60 to 80 percent of computer use at work is not work-related. Young people spend more time on social media sites like Facebook, and older workers spend more time on personal financial matters. Both groups engage in this behavior however, sometimes referred to as “cyberloafing.” The research is not good news. Organizational policies against using the Internet for personal business are difficult to enforce, and they are typically ignored. Even when employees are warned, threats of disciplinary action may go unheeded. This makes enforcement of policies the most viable method of dealing with cyberloafing, but of course this can have other drawbacks. This is what makes the EAO so valuable. Refer employees who struggle with self-discipline in controlling their Internet abuse. Some may have compulsive use problems that the EAO will identify. Others may need other assistance to maintain self-discipline.

Source: <http://www.k-state.edu/media/newsreleases/jan13/cyberloaf13113.html>

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## NOTES