

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I am a new supervisor who is replacing another leadership staff member who retired. Employees had a great deal of respect for my predecessor. How do I efficiently and quickly gain their trust?**

Understanding the meaning of trust can help you practice behaviors and set standards for yourself that will win the hearts and minds of your employees. Trust means reliance on and confidence in the truth, worth, and reliability of a person. Consider how these values translate into supervisory practice. Be a consistent communicator, along with making yourself accessible. This will remove the mystery between you and your employees, a frequently overlooked obstacle to building trust. Be truthful with employees. Doing so will build their confidence in you. Keep commitments and appointments and only promise what you are certain you can deliver. This will show employees that you are reliable.

■ **Is there a method or approach to inspiring employees? When I think of employees being inspired, I think of them as motivated. Are feeling inspired and feeling motivated the same thing?**

All inspired employees are motivated, but not all motivated employees necessarily feel inspired. Often, the two terms are used interchangeably, but a closer look reveals important differences. An employee can be motivated to accomplish work as a result of being provoked, aggravated, goaded, or annoyed into productivity. On the other hand, employees who feel inspired are moved internally, feel enthused about work accomplishments and are infectious in their excitement. Here's the formula: To inspire employees, summarize a goal, discuss its implications for everyone, remind workers of their past triumphs, and ask them to reflect on what drove them to achieve successful outcomes in the past. Finally, help them visualize what it will feel like to reach the goal.

■ **Last year our office held a holiday party at a hotel. A lot of employees, including me, drank quite a bit. No one drove home, but I worried the next day whether this kind of socializing harmed my image as a manager. Is it okay to socialize with employees in this manner?**

It is important to set a good example for your employees and to have effective relationships with them that can positively influence their productivity. Overdrinking at a holiday party is not consistent with these goals beyond the other potential risks of such an event. Socializing with employees can be risky. A debate still rages among experts about how familiar supervisors should be with their employees. Some argue for avoiding any outside social interaction. Others say just the opposite. Would hosting a baby shower or a fishing trip for your work group be a problem? It might if your position of influence is damaged as a result. This can happen more easily than you might

think. Before socializing with employees outside of work, ask yourself whether you risk damaging the perception employees have of you as a manager they respect. That perception is certainly what your employer wants.

■ Do economic downturns affect employee safety and wellness? Can the EAO play a role in helping employees reduce injuries?

During periods of economic downturn, employers naturally place constraints on resources. Employees may be reassigned, layoffs occur, new hires are delayed, longer hours are worked, and taking over a coworker's assignments may happen more often. This added stress increases the risk of employee injuries from worry and anxiety about the future of their positions, job security, or roles in the organization. Increasing communication between you and your employees can help. Keep the information flowing. According to *Gallup, 30% of workers worry about their job security and even more about benefits. This is double the number of employees who worried about such issues in 2008. Encourage employees to use EAO resources and consider opportunities for the EAO to help your employees manage stress and anxiety.

*Source: <http://tiny.cc/job-worry>

■ Certainly all supervisors eventually face the task of managing difficult employees. Beyond a magazine article or short seminar, though, I haven't seen much in-depth training. Is the EAO a good resource for this kind of help?

Contacting the EAO has several advantages. First and foremost is confidentiality. The EAO can also help you discover how your personality style supports or interferes with the process of managing difficult employees. It can challenge and help you to use new or different approaches. Role plays are very effective tools, and the EAO may suggest them. Admittedly, learning to respond properly to distressed, upset, or difficult employees is a "learning by doing" experience, but there are also principles worth knowing. Remaining calm, thinking deliberately before you speak, avoiding emotional involvement, practicing detachment, reducing provocative responses, and knowing how to problem-solve are only a few principles you can learn from the EAO.

NOTES