

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I like meetings because they bring people together. I've read a lot about making meetings efficient, but we still have problems with getting work done, nonparticipation, and low productivity. What efficiency tips can you offer that perhaps I have not heard before?**

Meetings can help people bond, but when that is the sole reason for their purpose, breakdown is ensured. Meetings should include selected individuals who gather as a team, all of whom then participate and work as a group to accomplish something. Can you say your meetings fit this model, or would another way to interact be better? Who is not essential for a meeting? Although some employees may feel slighted when uninvited, educate staff about the need for efficiency. Pay attention to solid reasons some offer along with their insistence on being included. It is a myth that all employees hate meetings. Some employees love meetings as distractions or social opportunities. Pay attention to how employees perform in meetings, and know that the EAO can help individuals who struggle with their inability to share work on a team, those who need to pull rank in the room or interrupt others, or those who have trouble with paying attention, staying on the subject, or respecting others.

■ **I became a manager because of my technical skills. I'd like to be more of an ideal manager with better people skills. Can the EAO help me?**

Meet with the EAO to explore your desire to improve your interpersonal skills. When you become aware of your emotions, and identify the emotions of others so you can manage yourself more effectively in relationships, you are applying emotional intelligence skills. These skills can be learned and improved on with education, awareness, exercises, and practice. Some of these behaviors can be challenging to learn if they require identifying and removing long-term ways of thinking. Short-term, goal-focused counseling can accelerate your progress. Meet with the EAO for a more in-depth discussion of emotional intelligence and how it applies to leadership performance. Find and read "What Makes a Leader?" by Daniel Goleman, from the January 2004 *Harvard Business Review*. It's an excellent starting point for your discussion in your meeting with the EAO. Go to: <http://hbr.org/2004/01/what-makes-a-leader>.

■ **It is easier for me to give feedback to a good performer than to do so with employees who are poor performers. I know the poor performer**

Giving feedback to good performers is pleasant and easy. But it's often difficult to do with employees who are poor performers. The stress of confrontation and fear of what may follow explain the resistance. A checklist or a method for giving negative feedback will help you approach those employees. You'll also avoid nasty surprises for the poor-performing employees at their annual review. One approach is to:

needs more feedback from me, but why do I resist? Is this a problem with other supervisors too?

1) Create a list of the performance issues you wish to discuss; 2) Discuss the impact of each, and the employee's awareness of that impact; 3) Share what will or could ultimately happen if the performance issues are not corrected; 4) Decide on a follow-up date and what should change by then; 5) Avoid diminishing the seriousness of performance problems with statements that relieve tension, such as "This is not a big deal, but you need to start making changes to..."); 6) Always offer help, resources, and the EAO to support the changes you require; 7) Whenever possible also include positive feedback on what the employee does well; 8) When performance is an concern, consult with your HR Rep.

How do I keep conflict and relationship problems in our department from interfering with customers and customer service?

Unfortunately, it is difficult to isolate conflict for very long. This is because the nature of "systems" dictates that all things are eventually affected by what happens in any other part of the system. Although you can impose stopgap measures to temporarily prevent the negative influences of employee conflicts on customer service, those measures will eventually erode. It is better to establish procedures for resolving conflicts permanently and quickly. Rule #1 is not to accept perpetual conflict between employees. It is up to the employees to resolve conflicts in a respectful manner and the key is your insistence on it. Be sure to set the expectations for respectful communication in the workplace. To discuss this further, you can contact the EAO to get ideas on how to reinforce these expectations.

Our workplace has a problem with everyone shifting blame to the other guy when things go wrong. How can we put an end to this dynamic, which does nothing to help us create a cohesive work environment?

The blame game is a workplace dynamic in which employees seek to ensure their personal survival by shifting blame for mistakes to other parties. When it becomes a pattern of interaction, the blame game is more accurately viewed as a symptom of a toxic or problematic work culture. You can stop it by creating a more positive and shared work culture in which managers are not afraid to use the "buck stops here" model of leadership. Blaming is a short-term solution that usually reinforces whatever dysfunction is provoking it. Blaming by definition means that lessons from mistakes are never learned and morale problems are maintained, resulting in lower productivity. Unfortunately, knee-jerk reactions to blame others reinforce the cycle. If you are uncertain about how to address an employee who tends to blame others, contact the EAO to help problem solve.

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