

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **My employee called in sick on Monday, saying he would be in on Tuesday. Tuesday came but not the employee. He didn't call again until Thursday, at which time he said he would be in on Friday. He didn't show on Friday. What causes this type of non-attendance pattern?**

**Many supervisors have** experienced this type of call-in and no-show behavior pattern. Experienced EA professionals have discovered that many types of personal problems can contribute to this behavior. These problems can range from legal entanglements to drug or alcohol abuse, severe marital discord or crises with troubled teenagers. An important point to note is that despite his failure to show up for work, your employee feels an investment in his job as evidenced by his repeated contact with you. You might feel the urge to fire such an employee outright. However, you should consider focusing on corrective action and on the EAO process, in which a supervisor referral can be very effective, especially if it has not been tried yet. It might lead to the resolution of the employee's problem whatever that may be.

■ **It's often hard for me to delegate and let go. How can I become more adept at trusting my employees with assignments and not be so controlling or hover over them?**

**Not letting go** and exerting control create more anxiety for you than does allowing those you supervise to manage their work. Your first step toward change is to understand that controlling behavior feels like domination and is disrespectful to your employees. It does not feel helpful and supportive. Some people learn early in life to act controlling because they have modeled it after others who played significant roles in their lives. Others learn controlling behaviors by being forced to rely on themselves in order to meet basic needs or feel safe in unsafe environments. There are many reasons a person exerts overly controlling behaviors; however, working with your EAO can help you implement a simple plan for letting go that will help you meet your goal, find more balance, and be happier in your job.

■ **Three of my employees argue and bicker with each other, and I am interested in having the EAO help resolve this conflict. I have identified one of the employees as the "troublemaker." Should I refer them**

**There are no** hard and fast rules about a supervisor referral of the type you describe, but experience shows that referring each of these employees separately based upon the performance issues you have documented can produce good results. Supervisor referrals should be based on individual employee's issues, not the group's issues, because each employee reacts differently to this conflict and each has a different story to tell. Also, this approach better conforms to EAO standards. Each of your employees has a role to play in the resolution of the conflict, even if one

**individually, as a group or just the one employee mentioned?**

employee is more provocative. After an initial assessment, the EAO consultant may choose to work with your employees as a group, individually or both. Consult with the EAO before making the referral.

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**■ I want to push my employees to do their best, but I don't want to be accused of bullying. How can I help employees maximize their productivity but not have them see me as aggressive, especially as a bully?**

**The most common** behaviors perpetrated by bullies in the workplace can also be accidentally attributed to well-meaning supervisors, who without malice may use supervisory work practices that produce ill effects for their employees. A few examples include: 1) having their opinions and views ignored, 2) having information withheld that affects their performance, 3) being allotted an unmanageable workload, 4) being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines, and 5) being ordered to do work below competence. The importance of good communication is crucial because you cannot know how employees perceive your drive to maintain high levels of productivity. Where your goal is simply to get work done under pressure, employees may view your treatment of them as hostile. Take responsibility as a supervisor by having a proactive, two-way communication process that allows you to get feedback as to whether or not your style is problematic for those you supervise. To learn more about this communication process, contact the EAO.

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**■ As a supervisor, how can I help my employees use emotional intelligence to do a better job at managing our customers? Is it too technical a concept to discuss and over the head of someone like me who is not clinical or the recipient of an advanced degree?**

**Emotional intelligence** (EI) is not too difficult to discuss with your employees. Use a brief definition of EI: the ability to recognize, describe, understand, manage, influence, and utilize emotions effectively in human relationships. The following EI ideas can help your employees be more effective and experience less stress with regard to customers: 1) Pay attention to customers' emotions and how they change or shift so that the needs of the customer are more precisely met. 2) Use empathy with customers. 3) Use emotions in communications (e.g., "Are you happy with the service you received?" versus "Did you get your question answered?") Anticipate customers' concerns and inquire about them before they are stated. 5) Pay attention to body language that can give signals as to needs or desires. There are many more ideas about how to use EI at work, but these examples will help generate deeper customer loyalty. Remember, on campus our customers are students (external) and co-workers (internal).

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## NOTES