

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



Employee Assistance Office (EAO) – 608-263-2987 – [www.eao.wisc.edu](http://www.eao.wisc.edu)

■ **One of my employees appears unmotivated and unwilling to go the extra mile, unlike her peers. Can the EAO be helpful in this situation? There are no job problems, and I consider her work to be satisfactory.**

**Something about this** employee's work style is concerning you despite the satisfactory level of performance. True, you don't have a reason to suggest the EAO or make a supervisory referral, but you may want to monitor her work performance over the next few weeks or months. Inquire about her productivity, job satisfaction, and interest in the work. Consider gathering observational data to support your inquiry about her motivation. This is not a diagnostic inquiry, but good supervision. When you meet, the employee may share information in your meeting that leads you to suggest the EAO.

■ **How can supervisors gain a better appreciation for the impact their behaviors have on those under their supervision?**

**The simple answer is:** to have a close working relationship with your employees. Part of that relationship involves "checking in" on communication, interaction, and mutual understanding between each other. Learning about emotional intelligence (EI) is a way to appreciate human interaction and impact as well. In this context, you're able to monitor your emotions and recognize the emotions of others and label them. Use this information to guide your behavior and thinking. Many resources are available to introduce you to EI skill-building. Your EAO can point the way to these resources. Another awareness to appreciate is the "trickle down" effect of supervision. The supervisor/supervisee dynamic is so strong that it can affect an employee's personal life. Supervisor interactions at work have been shown to create conflicts at home for the employee. This indirect influence is referred to as "social undermining" and has been documented.

■ **I know poor communication is the No. 1 key complaint in results of employee surveys. What other common problems lead to employee dissatisfaction with organizations?**

**Other problems ranking** almost as high as communication complaints are lack of: recognition and praise, training and educational opportunities, flexibility in work schedules, and authority given to employees. The key is to avoid making employees feel like a cog in a wheel. Target ways to make your employees feel valued and you'll be on the right track. Consider how to improve communication, feedback, and recognition; offer ways to insert training and educational opportunities into your employees' experience at work. One idea may be to create a peer advisory or brainstorming group to discuss the issues. You'll be amazed at the ideas that will emerge from such an approach.

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■ **I know supervisors who ignore problem employees when they should be faced and referred to the EAO. Why do supervisors delay consulting with the EAO and dealing with the employee?**

**Even though it has** been documented that consulting with the EAO reduces stress for supervisors, there is sometimes a reluctance to use it due to a resistance to change, or preference to involve themselves in resolving their employees' personal problems. This sometimes leads to having after-hour counseling sessions, loaning money, talking to spouses, taking employees on social outings, or even having a drink with an employee to 'talk things over.' Most supervisors know this is not their role, but some derive personal satisfaction from getting involved. Unfortunately, chronic performance problems often have serious root causes. Supervisors may revisit the same problem for years. Eventually, frustration mounts, leading to a desire to terminate the employee because he or she has been labeled "hopeless."

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■ **There are so many resources online to help employees with everything from being assertive to managing stress to improving work relationships. What is the benefit of EAO if all you have to do is "google" to get help?**

**There are countless** helpful resources online, but unfortunately it's hard to know which ones to trust. It is not easy to evaluate the quality of information you may glean from the internet. Helping employees encompasses understanding the nature of a personal problem, providing motivational counseling, and keeping the process on track with follow-up. Often, determining the nature of a problem is difficult, and appropriate referral resources may need to be thoroughly examined so there is a successful problem/solution match. The strength of the EAO lies in the assessment and referral process working together for a positive outcome.