

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



Employee Assistance Office (EAO) – 608-263-2987 – www.eao.wisc.edu

■ My employee has been no-call/no-show too many times, so we decided to let him go. He did visit the EAO months ago, but was not open to help. I wonder if I should have done something more, but am not sure what that would have been.

■ I was reprimanded recently and told to be more proactive in my management style. The leadership also wants my employees to fall in line with this approach. What is proactive management, and how do I instill this in employees? Can the EAO help with something like this?

■ Supervisors are supposed to play a role in reducing workplace stress. What areas of workplace stress most affect employees? Knowing what they are would help me consider strategies to deal with the most important issues.

Employees who are no-call/no-show may have severe personal problems, other sources of financial support making the job unimportant, or extreme ambivalence about the job for some reason. Referral to the EAO is an important step. Realize, however, that you may never discover the explanation for this behavior. Fear of job loss appears to be of no importance to some employees. EAO's have observed that employees with addictions can sometimes be no-call/no-shows. While an employee is under the influence and incapacitated, any sense of urgency or concern about the job may disappear. When the person is clean and sober, remorse and a desire to keep the job may then become immense. This pattern then becomes cyclical.

Proactive means “anticipatory.” Management wants your energies and resources used to think ahead, anticipate problems and issues, and to avoid “reacting” to problems within your work unit. Here's the key: Strategize and target problems that have not yet happened in an effort to prevent them. The EAO is not an expert on your specific functions, but is experienced at coaching, analyzing, and consulting on the mandate you've been given. The EAO's assistance can help you explore ways to stay on track with management's directive. For more insight, consider a book dedicated to this topic, *Proactive Personality and Behavior for Individual and Organizational Productivity* (New Horizons in Management series) by Andrew J. DuBrin.

There are broad categories of stress worth knowing about that can help you stay attuned to relationship and workplace dynamics. Stress research usually focuses on 1) conflicts with supervisors, 2) complaints about the work culture and factors associated with it, and 3) dissatisfaction with making too minimal a contribution, not feeling like one belongs, is included, or fits in. This includes a feeling of not being valued for contributions made. Keep these categories in mind in conversations with employees and when dealing with

normal workplace conflict. These points can alert you to take action, and can reduce turnover if you jump on problems quickly and resolve them. Turn to the EAO to help you, as needed.

■ **I am not a counselor; I am an electrician. However, I have known my employee for 20 years. I think the EAO could benefit from my opinion on his psychological problems. Should I keep this information to myself or suggest what I think this employee's issues might be?**

When you communicate with the EAO, especially in writing, you should stay with the appropriate and necessary information to support the rationale for your supervisor referral. This may include quality of work, conduct, attendance, and other observable and measurable factors that can be documented. The EAO will not ask your opinion about what you think the underlying psychological causes for the employee's troubles might be. To do so, immediately places you in an inappropriate role for which you are not qualified, can't play, should not play, or all three. There is nothing to prohibit or stop you from verbally telling the EAO what you think is going on with your employee, but do not expect the EAO to participate in a discussion about these issues, probe further, validate what you have to say, or rely on this information in conducting an assessment.

■ **How do I practice detachment in order to go home at the end of the day better able to focus on home life, sleep better, and be less concerned about employee issues at work? Is this a learned skill or an ability a few lucky supervisors are born with?**

Detachment is more of an art than a skill. It comes with practice, and you get better over time by the practice of letting go, observing your resistance, and making adjustments to improve your ability. Detachment allows you to become more accomplished at work and contented at home. There is always more to learn about detachment. You will not succeed all the time. No job that entails interacting with the human condition enjoys complete and utter detachment. Imagine an emergency operating room physician who is not able to detach from work. Stress and its ultimate effects would incapacitate even the most skilled doctor. If you struggle with detachment, talk to the EAO. They will help and guide you toward discovering a more happy personal and professional life.