

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **Is there an explanation for what appears to be laziness in an employee? Should I consider this person as troubled and refer him to the EAO?**

Laziness is associated with behaviors that can be measured. Focus on measurable outcomes and not the label. Consider a few supervisory interventions before making your referral: 1) Ask your employee what is preventing him from getting his work done. 2) Have a discussion with your employee about the position description. Does he really know what it is? Delve deeper and ask your employee what he thinks the job entails. Answers to these questions will tell you a great deal about the problem. 3) Decide what constitutes satisfactory performance and give your employee a project. Over a period of weeks, note progress and quantifiable issues that demonstrate performance or lack of performance. Consult with Human Resources if changes are not forthcoming.

■ **Why should supervisors consult with the EAO early in the process of managing troubled employees? Sometimes I work with an employee for months or perhaps a year before deciding to involve the EAO.**

The rationale for consulting with the EAO early is one of risk reduction as much as it is helping the employee. Over the course of months or even years of engaging with a potentially manipulative worker, you are at risk for saying and doing things that may not be in the best interest of yourself or the organization. Engaging with the EAO earlier helps you avoid emotional hooks because you feel the EAO's support. EAOs have experience, and can often make early appraisals about the nature of problems. Consulting with the EAO, therefore, will save you time and anxiety that could last years.

■ **I had a meeting to discuss my employee's tardiness. She said personal issues with her husband were to blame, but she was getting counseling. I decided against a supervisor referral at that point. She's doing great now, but should I have referred her to the EAO?**

You could have made a supervisor referral, even though your employee had other plans. Regardless, your employee's tardiness has stopped. That means your corrective interview with her was successful. An EAO referral is not a required way to solve a personal problem. It's not a replacement for community resources that employees may wish to use. Your employee had a plan for correcting her tardiness—getting counseling with her husband. This is the desired outcome from the organization's viewpoint. If this employee starts coming into work late again, pick up your discussion where you left off and make the supervisor referral, even if your employee

has another plan. This time your employee will have the EAO advantage— a professional with an accurate understanding of the employment issues, an impartial assessment, motivational counseling, appropriate communication with you, and a follow-up.

- **What if I refer an employee to the EAO and they don't think they need it? Isn't it important for the employee being referred to somewhat believe they need help so it is not a waste of the EAO consultant's time?**

The EAO consultant would not consider it a waste of time to meet with an employee who at first appears unmotivated, in denial, or otherwise convinced they do not need help. The important issue is whether the employee came of their own volition. Regarding motivation, desire, and insight—these often arrive later by way of an assessment and use of interviewing techniques called motivational counseling. It is quite normal for troubled employees to walk into an EAO office with one or more of three common viewpoints: 1) It's my supervisor's fault—I am not the one with the problem; 2) I am only here because I was told I had to come; and 3) I have no idea why I am here. All three of these are standard fare for EAOs, and employee assistance professionals know how to address each one.

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- **I give feedback to my employees – each one – several times a year, but I do not do the “walking around to catch people doing things right” approach I see in management reading material. How much feedback and how often is recommended by experts?**

The question of giving praise and feedback, including negative feedback, is not about frequency and numbers. This communication helps produce a work climate that develops your staff and helps them achieve their work objectives. Many supervisors fail to understand the personal power they possess to influence their employees' morale, motivation, desire to perform, or innovation. Supervisors are in control of all these things by way of a dynamic called “delegated authority.” A supervisor's ability to influence these attitudes and behaviors is not earned like respect. It is instantaneous with the title, unless it is undermined in some way. The ideal balance regarding feedback exists when employees know where they stand with you and what you think about their performance.