

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ We talk a lot about helping troubled employees, but what are some of the most common behaviors of troubled supervisors that negatively affect employees? If I am aware of what they are, perhaps I can intervene before they become habits.

■ It's been said that the EAO can be an alternative to discipline but not a substitute for it. This sounds like the same thing to me. Can you explain?

■ My employee is not happy in her job. There is no place in the organization where she can be transferred. What can I do before suggesting an EAO referral?

Troubling behaviors of supervisors can be costly for organizations.

Troubled supervisors have a multiplier effect because they have influence over others and work systems. We've all heard of bosses who are bullies or those who were catalysts for workplace violence. Some employees become severely depressed over supervisory practices. You've probably heard the phrase, "Employees don't leave companies; they leave supervisors." This refers to the high cost of turnover. The Workplace Bullying Institute reports that 44% of workers have had an abusive boss. The behaviors cited by employees as the most painful and disruptive were sarcastic jokes, public criticism of job performance, interrupting a worker in a rude manner, yelling or raising one's voice, and ignoring an employee as if he or she were invisible. If you are having more questions about how to be a better supervisor, contact the EAO for a confidential consultation, or refer your supervisors for coaching to learn how to be more effective.

The EAO can help employees improve job performance, in many cases by resolving personal problems that can interfere with job performance. The EAO loses value when it is treated as a substitute for disciplinary action. This practice uses the EAO as a disciplinary response by the supervisor which damages the employee's perception of the EAO. It is important the employee continues to see the EAO as a positive, safe, and constructive resource to resolving personal problems that may interfere with job performance.

Sit down with your employee and find out what is causing her to appear unhappy in her job, and document this discussion. There are perhaps a hundred reasons employees become unhappy, and they can range from not knowing what they are doing to having various medical or behavioral health problems. It is true that unhappiness alone is not a performance problem. However, the behavior or attitude associated with being unhappy can still affect the work environment, her initiative, and her demeanor, and can create an unsupportive work environment that adversely affects coworkers and their productivity.

If you can't make headway on work-related issues first, consult with the EAO. Together, you may discover ideas to help renew her enthusiasm for the position. Make the EAO referral if these first steps do not produce the results you need to help her become a fully engaged member of your team.

■ **What is the difference between being a good manager and being a good leader? Can the EAO help with leadership issues, or is this development of leaders more of an education and training process apart from what the EAO does?**

Peter Drucker, known as “the father of modern management” once said, “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” This adage has meaning for nearly all supervisors because you will have the opportunity to play both roles at some point. Leadership is not just a few people at the top making all the decisions—it’s an organizational process. Many supervisors are not used to thinking like leaders, and a lack of definition can make leadership sound mysterious. The key is viewing those under your supervision not as individuals with specific functions you monitor, but as part of an orchestra of talent and potential that you guide to achievement. This view of leadership places the emphasis on the team’s success to define your own success. The EAO is an excellent resource for helping you look in the “leadership mirror” to see potential roadblocks in your approach to leadership that keep you from connecting with your team the way you envision.

■ **How can I be more assertive with the help of the EAO? I tend to avoid certain employees I do not like to supervise. I feel they have difficult personalities. I know I need to change this coping style because it is creating unspoken tension. I can feel it.**

To start being assertive, understand the value in practicing it. Without assertiveness you participate in laissez-faire management, which means you are supporting a policy or attitude of letting things take their own course without interference. This usually has only one result: things spiral out of control. The good news is that assertiveness is easier to learn than most people think because there are mechanics, word phrases, and sentence structures that can be tested and their results experienced. Find assertive language you can practice, watch the result, make a tweak, and try again. Eventually you will see results. The EAO consultants are pros at helping employees, including supervisors, be assertive. The EA professional can help you get started and make progress.

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