

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



■ **I am a new supervisor, and employees have been coming to me with their need to talk about work issues. They require a good listener. The issues include concerns about downsizing, performance, coworker conflicts, angry staff, and more. How can I be a good listener?**

The “**active listening model**” will help you demonstrate empathy with your employees in job-related discussions. Start by inviting an employee to sit down in your office. Make the person comfortable, and demonstrate that you are glad he or she came by to talk. Let the employee talk about the issues or concerns. The more you talk, the less your employee will talk, so be careful about jumping in too quickly. When responding, don’t say, “I know how you feel.” Instead say, “It sounds like you were really frightened by that person’s tone of voice.” Paraphrase what was said, so your employee feels heard. Ask questions using “who,” “what,” “where,” and “how.” These four words elicit additional information, and your employee is less likely to forget something important in his or her story. Remember, this is not psychological counseling. These are practical listening skills for improving any relationship.

■ **How can supervisors play a role in helping employees not bring their problems to work, and separating their home life from their work life so productivity is not affected?**

The **EAO adage** that employees do not leave their problems at the front door when they come to work is a rallying cry for the growth of EAPs, but another part of this reality is that employees must be appropriately confronted when personal problems interfere with their productivity, attendance, quality of work, availability, and attitude. No supervisor will be able to prevent an employee from bringing his or her personal problems to work. However, supervisors can play a powerful role in helping employees seek help earlier before interference occurs. This is what drives EAO utilization up. The promotion of the EAO to supervisors is crucial, allowing these managers to feel empowered in confronting employees and confident that the EAO is a viable resource. It is also key to avoiding any delay in making supervisory referrals.

■ **We have an employee who has entered a drug and alcohol treatment program. Should I encourage workers to visit him there or discourage these visitations?**

**Talk with the EAO** for guidance on this matter. If a release is signed for you at the treatment program, discuss it with the counselor there. Otherwise, allow employees to make their own decisions rather than advocate either way. Your question raises important issues. Most people who enter addiction treatment do so under duress. Some influence (such as a spouse) or form of leverage (like a court order) provided the motivation needed to accept admission.

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**We don't want him to feel abandoned or ashamed, so we're thinking it might be the right thing for people to drop by.**

Denial in early treatment still impedes a patient's ability to accept their illness. Hence, they are highly subject to leaving against medical advice (AMA). Such an event may result from the desire to drink or use drugs, or provocation from family, friends, or drug-using acquaintances who visit. The rules associated with visitation are therefore strict to prevent adversely affecting the motivation of the patient and to prevent their leaving AMA.

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**■ I am trying to get my employees to buy into the mission and the vision that I have for our work unit. I have a couple of employees who are not cooperative. Their skills are acceptable, but they act like wet blankets. Can I refer them to the EAO?**

**A wide spectrum of behaviors** constitutes job performance. These entail quality of work as well as attitude and conduct on the job. If it is consistent with your performance evaluation and review process, consider incorporating measurable ways of evaluating attitude, cooperation, and enthusiasm so they are meaningful in the evaluation. Often these performance factors are not well defined on an evaluation form. Why not define what they mean before the evaluation period? You will discover that this is a powerful approach if you try it. If a positive attitude is desired, what demonstrates it? What does not? A thesaurus is helpful for finding action words for your definition. Be fair about applying these measures to everyone. You should see attitudes change because you have now properly linked attitude to performance. Consult with your HR department along the way. If behavior does not respond to your corrective approaches, then consider a referral to the EAO.

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**■ I am very stressed out in my supervisor role. I would like to relax and physically work off my stress, but I have never noticed any benefit when I hop on the treadmill as I attempt to relieve stress. As a result, I don't keep up with it.**

**Physical activity is one of the best** ways to release stress, but don't expect much if you only begin to exercise when you're already stressed out. For real benefits, you must make a commitment to a regular program 20-30 minutes a day consistently, with your doctor's approval. (Be sure to warm up before putting exercise stress on your heart.) If you keep up with your exercise program, you will experience better capability and resilience when you are under stress in the future. This is called stress immunization.

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## NOTES