

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



My employees are under a lot of pressure to perform, and it seems that those who put in the most hours get ahead. Burnout risk is high, but competition keeps people from complaining. How do I spot early signs of burnout if employees don't complain?

Even if your employees do not complain about stress, you can still recognize behaviors that signal the adverse effects of overwork. Remember that behavioral symptoms can mean something other than burnout. You will never know for sure, so do not become a diagnostician to your employees. As you interact with employees, be on the lookout for statements or behaviors associated with being drained of emotional energy, being “snappy” and irritable, refusing to socialize with others, cynicism, appearing withdrawn and unexcited about events in the workplace that should perk them up, or possible complaints about relationship at home being troublesome. Consult with the EAO to learn about more symptoms or for guidance on making a referral.

I referred my employee to the EAO and she entered treatment for a drug-use problem. I think I am entitled to know more than the EAO is telling me about what's going on with her, because I'm the one who has been helping her all along.

Major changes are coming for your employee, but they are also coming for you. One such change is a new relationship that does not include overseeing your employee's life the way you have been accustomed to doing. Shifting gears requires learning to detach, unfamiliar as that may feel. Your employee will learn to take responsibility for her own life and recovery program. She will also learn to avoid having you be responsible for her. Ask yourself if you have gained meaning from your role as the responsible person. Will you feel ignored or forgotten if the employee no longer wants you to be responsible for her? Continuing such a relationship may jeopardize your employee's recovery despite your best intentions, and treatment will include helping the employee understand this risk. The new role for you is that of a supportive supervisor who focuses on job performance.

■ **Our work unit is participating in a three-part workshop on diversity awareness in a couple of weeks. A few employees are grumbling about being asked to participate, but isn't this training an appropriate expectation?**

■ **I know the EAO is available to consult with me on troubled employees and how to effectively refer them to the EAO. What other types of consultative help are available to supervisors from the EAO?**

■ **What does it mean to be a proactive supervisor? Being proactive allows them to manage stress more effectively, and they go home at the end of the day less tired. By being confident and optimistic, proactive managers can inspire employees.**

Your workforce is your organization's most valuable resource. Continuing education, awareness, and training all contribute to helping it maintain its value. Diversity and inclusion activities fit this purpose, as would any other topic that could enhance its functioning. Today's workplace is increasingly diverse, and where organizations or employees fail to value worker equality, they risk higher levels of conflicts, higher turnover, loss of employee loyalty, and the domino effect from dysfunction that flows from employee biases becoming prejudices that damage morale. Diversity awareness gives organizations a chance to instill in employees the mutual positive regard critical to workplace harmony. It is about understanding the critical role of respect and how important it is to value every worker, no matter their differences, so job satisfaction is more likely.

Beyond consulting with the EAO about performance issues and referrals, consider the EAO as an expert source of help and guidance in five additional areas: 1) Improving relationships you have with your employees by examining your leadership strengths, communication style, and any opportunities for improving these skills; 2) Discovering ways to engage individual employees based on your observations of their work habits and personality styles and thereby maximizing their productivity and job satisfaction; 3) Assistance for yourself in understanding how to better manage stress; 4) Help for difficulties you face in communicating, engaging, and satisfying the needs of upper management; and 5) Guidance in managing team communication, team development, and resolving conflicts among employees, especially where personalities clash.

Proactive supervisors are more successful at establishing the conditions that require their response, while supervisors who are not proactive must react more often to conditions that are thrust upon them. When supervisors are proactive, they plan for the future to produce and create desired outcomes, rather than waiting and reacting to issues, concerns, problems, and crises that will appear later, often in more severe forms. Proactive supervisors are able to influence direction, control events, and feel more satisfaction in their positions. They put out fewer fires. Being proactive does not mean supervisors will not experience sudden problems or crises that require attention and an immediate response, but it does mean that they will naturally experience fewer of them. Contact the EAO to learn ways to put down the fire hose and focus on preventing the flames. Then you can support your direct reports in becoming self-motivated, innovative problem solvers, too!

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