

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OFFICE (EAO) – 608/263-2987 – [www.wisc.edu/eao](http://www.wisc.edu/eao)

■ **How can I help employees experience more positive communication and less negativity with one another?**

When employee interaction is not positive, you'll discover that workplace communication in general is often the culprit. Communication breakdown, a lack of information sharing, miscommunication, and unresolved tension often feed the negativity. Some suggestions for improving employee communication are: beyond regular business matters, discuss the status of healthy communication among employees. Actually make workplace communication a meeting agenda item, because it really is a business matter. Ask, "Does anyone here have issues or concerns they would like to share or discuss regarding our communication with one another or within the organization?" "What about issues regarding our individual roles and duties? Is there anything there we need to discuss?" "What about unresolved resource issues, needs, or concerns?" Over time, you will witness less friction and less of a need to process these questions as positivity and trust among employees returns.

■ **What more can supervisors do to improve the likelihood that an employee will make desired changes in behaviors or improved productivity without threatening the employee?**

**Supervisors** usually know what they want changed or corrected, but just as important as what they want is "when" they want it. Make sure your employee knows the specific date that you need to see changes by. Supervisors often omit the "when" from corrective interviews. Think about your own life experience. What leads you to actually take the steps to accomplish a task, especially one you would rather delay? Your energy to get moving, take action, and finish a task is often prompted by a deadline, which creates a sense of urgency. Start thinking "EAO referral" if this strategy of identifying "what" and "when" fails to help your employee make the changes you seek.

■ **One of the hardest things for me to do is admit my mistakes. I think perhaps it's out of fear of being taken advantage of. What's the downside to not admitting my mistakes?**

**Contrary to** what you might think, employees are attracted not so much to the smart and right supervisor but to the authentic supervisor. You appear safer and more approachable to your employees if you are more real to them. This is what gives charismatic leaders their edge. Their authenticity comes through. When you model being your true self, you prompt others around you to do the same. They may no longer feel the need to stay as inhibited or afraid to show their vulnerable side or real selves. Outside the home, having a work environment that facilitates and encourages authenticity is a valuable thing. It is a luxury to feel

unencumbered by the need to be defensive and protect ourselves from the larger world. The more authentic you appear as a leader, the more your employees will want to be part of your inner circle rather than reject it. Admitting mistakes and being human is part of this authentic profile.

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**■ I read where half the workforce in America is stressed about the economy. Many people are losing money. A counselor isn't going to replace lost funds, so what can the EAO do?**

**Losing money** or a percentage of one's net worth is enormously stressful. Although no one can replace the losses, do not underestimate the value of listening, support and professional assessment as critical first steps in limiting the mental health effects of the financial crisis and accepting the reality of what has happened. Once this occurs, a person can turn to the task of working toward adapting to the new reality with a plan to cope with financial limitations or to rebuild financial resources. People cope with crisis, fear and panic differently. If other personal problems coexist with these states, then such an event can magnify feelings of desperation, hopelessness, depression and other health issues. The EAO will work diligently to help your employee survive the loss, provide effective coping strategies and when appropriate make referrals to outside resources.

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**■ I know the EAO can help employees improve job performance and address personal problems, but what are some of the less frequently discussed ways an organization can benefit by referring employees to the EAO?**

**The positive** ripple effects of the EAO are numerous, such as: intervention with behavioral issues long before such issues become critical, as in the case of workplace violence. EAO consultants can help supervisors improve supervision practices, prevent dismissals and turnover, and facilitate resolution of employee disputes with the organization before they become difficult litigious problems. They may assist in resolving co-worker conflicts, which improves productivity. And they can boost the functionality of work teams or get drug-dependent workers to the right treatment the first time. EAO activities may have an impact on reducing accidents, decreasing risk of employment practices liability, helping curtail dozens of counterproductive workplace behaviors, improving communication, and training employees in many types of soft skills. Many of these benefits are difficult to measure, report on, or quantify, but they are ongoing.

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## NOTES