

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **My employee argues with me in ways that I would not have dreamt of when I was his age 25 years ago. What can I do about a disrespectful employee? Is this part of the “transformational” world we live in, or do I need to be more assertive?**

**Some things** should not change. One of them is respect and civility. You must assert your authority with an employee who is disrespectful. Meet with your employee and list incidents that are unacceptable. State that the behaviors will incur consequences if the disrespect continues. Your employee may claim that he is not being disrespectful; however, you will need to define the standards of behavior and expect change. The good news is that you will probably be successful in correcting this behavior in one interview because most employees heed direct messages of this sort. The EAO can help, but don't let these behaviors continue too long before making a referral. Other issues may contribute to an inability to control this behavior and the EAO can help sort them out.

■ **I have an employee who does not participate in any after-hour activities that the other employees attend. She's a great performer, but I tend to think more highly of employees who join in the fun. Should I inquire about why she does not join in? Maybe there's a personal problem.**

**Employees who** do not participate in social activities are often judged harshly for what appears to be their avoidant or “antisocial” style by those who feel annoyed or rejected by their absence. More often than not, these employees are not demonstrating struggles with work-life balance or mental health issues associated with social avoidance. Instead, they may have close and valued relationships away from work that more effectively meet their needs. Many dedicated workers may not see potential gains in undirected social activity. Some prefer closer, more intimate associations and are unmoved by peer pressure to join in other social opportunities. Some employees simply prefer their own company and the solitude of their creative thoughts. Try sharing how much you would personally like this employee to join you and the group and if they opt out, respect their decision.

■ **Did the EAO fail to work if performance problems remained after the employee met with a consultant and was cooperative? What's next now that problems remain?**

**Not every employee** referred to the EAO will resolve personal problems or performance issues. Still, the EAO serves the valuable purpose of giving you another alternative to tolerating or terminating troubled employees. Ideally, employees should return to prior levels of performance. If not, you should make a decision about your next step. Your HR Rep can advise you about what your administrative reaction should be; however, let the EAO know about the status of your employee regardless of your decision. Your EAO worked as intended, but employees are in control of whether they use its services and benefit from them.

---

■ **I have done very well in my career, so they keep moving me up the ladder. I am happy about it, but I can't seem to relax and accept my success. Self-doubt still creeps in, and I am feeling more fear because more is expected of me, and the stakes are higher. How can I relax?**

**It is easy to** fall victim to the stresses associated with success. When you earn promotions, gain responsibility, and wield more authority, your inner voice can begin to work against you. You can feel like an imposter who does not deserve such success, and your anxiety can translate into an ongoing sense that others will discover that you are ill-equipped for your role. Self-doubt can even get to the point where you are rereading positive written comments on old performance evaluations. Challenge the inner voices and scrutinize the validity of your fears. Acknowledge how they can undermine your life so that you muster the will to overcome them. The key is to eliminate defeatist self-talk by changing the wording. If your inner voice says, "I have no idea what I'm doing," replace that with, "I am learning more every day." If it says, "People think I don't deserve to have this job," replace that with, "I am earning their respect." Don't hesitate to contact the EAO for more support.

---

■ **I referred my employee to the EAO for performance issues, but was asked, "What will the EAO do or say to me?" I know the EAO helps employees, but I couldn't be specific. I think the employee is worried about sharing too much with the EAO.**

**Most employees** do not realize that the EAO does not treat employees psychologically and only interviews as much as needed to ascertain the true nature of the personal problem, with the goal of getting the employee to the right source of help. This is a critical distinction that can help employees feel more willing to go for help. Confidential assessment and referral are the operative terms. The EAO will not attempt a long-term treatment relationship as that is better left to the treatment providers. All this is good information for your employee to know. Employees do typically disclose highly personal information in assessments; however, the EAO consultant knows how to interview properly to gather only the necessary information.

---

## NOTES