

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I haven't referred an employee to the EAO before, but tell me, what is the most important thing I can do to convince the employee to go if there are no serious performance issues?**

There are a few workplace concerns but they have not risen to the level of "serious" yet.

■ **In our organization, we encourage employees to report co-workers whose behavior appears dangerous or who are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. To date, it's never happened. What can make a difference in this area?**

■ **I want to improve my communication with employees and act more social with them in the office; however,**

The most common reasons employees hesitate to visit the EAO are fear of the unknown, being asked personal questions, and confidentiality concerns. You can support the EAO by reassuring employees that no personal information will be forthcoming to you. Also, the employee's contact with the EAO will not be reflected in their personnel file. Even an outstanding EAO with solid communication strategies and excellent internal relationships will from time to time need to surmount the fear employees have about confidentiality. Supporting confidentiality is, therefore, a vital role for you.

Unfortunately, sometimes co-workers enable just like family members do. Very few want to be the snitch or the one who "caused" the termination of a peer. It is far easier to cover up, protect, do the co-worker's job, lie or even take the blame for the co-worker's performance problems. There have been instances where enablers chose to be fired for a performance incident caused by an addicted worker instead of pointing them out. Education about enabling and the disease of alcoholism and drug addiction done periodically (without ceasing) alongside a tough policy that includes assurances of support for addicted workers, is how enabling behaviors are diminished. This makes the difference. The "social responsibility" message to report a peer will not succeed as well in the absence of this supportive environment. In many instances, the EAO is the only place where many enablers would even consider taking this first step toward the decision to speak up.

Remember that a professional supervisory relationship does not mean an unfriendly supervisory relationship. When employees are relaxed and socializing at work, entering into their conversation is not an intrusion: they are at work. Look for opportunities like this one to join a casual conversation: When you see several employees talking and laughing in

I am worried that they see me as “all business.” I don’t want to intrude on their social gatherings, but how can I begin to engage more casually with them?

a small group, approach the group and in a friendly way, greet the group. Attempt to participate in the conversation, not take over or dominate it. Notice how your presence affects your employees. Do they greet and welcome you, or does the group start breaking apart? How do you want employees to respond to your presence? This is an important question to consider. Don’t hesitate to consult the EAO for confidential coaching to improve your engagement with employees.

■ How can supervisors help ensure that employees will demonstrate high levels of productivity on the job and the least amount of counterproductive work behaviors?

Managers positively influence employee behaviors in many ways, an important one being, to make sure employees know what they are supposed to be doing and how they will be held accountable. Counterproductive workplace behaviors are significant among employees who experience ambiguity about these things. A study by Florida State University’s College of Business found only 20% of employees knew what they were supposed to accomplish each day at work and how they would be held accountable. The other 80% experienced behavioral problems such as conflicts, absenteeism, trust issues, job neglect, personality conflicts, and morale problems. It is not uncommon for the EAO to hear employee complaints about ambiguity associated with duties and accountability. Rare or nonexistent performance reviews will make these problems worse. When difficult employee problems arise, always consider whether ambiguity about duties and accountability are compounding the issues you face.

<http://news.fsu.edu/More-FSU-News/A-question-of-accountability-What-happens-when-employees-are-left-in-the-dark>

■ Many employees are concerned about the economy, but it is not practical to recommend every one of them to the EAO. My concern is risk of accidents or injury from distractions and stress. Are these valid concerns?

Some evidence exists that during economic downturns, stress, job reassignments, and layoffs there is an increased risk of injuries and accidents. Remind employees to keep in mind that safety is always important, probably more so during these periods. Of course, there is a lot more to helping employees think about safety. During stressful periods, don’t counsel employees, but rather be a good listener, show empathy, and be willing to refer them to the EAO. Using patience and recognizing their stress is not a solution, but it will demonstrate welcomed support. Most organizations periodically face morale and internal conflicts that can make it difficult for employees to feel excited, cooperate, or “buy in” to what management wants them to do. During economic downturns, however, these struggles are exacerbated, and safety programs can falter under such circumstances. Accidents and injuries can follow.

Source: <http://bstsolutions.com/supervisors-and-managers> (Leading Safety in a Downturn)

NOTES