

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **Other than “what to say” and “how to say it,” what is the most important thing supervisors can do to improve the likelihood of employees accepting supervisor referrals to the Employee Assistance Office?**

An important thing to avoid is accidentally reinforcing common myths and misconceptions about EAOs. No matter how well an EAO is promoted or its confidentiality ensured, misunderstandings about the EAO can occur. For example, (Myth: Going to the EAO means I have a psychological problem.) As a supervisor you should avoid any indication that you are labeling the employee as having a psychological problem. (Myth: A supervisor referral is a preliminary step to disciplinary action.) Keep the focus on performance and how EA professionals can help employees address factors that may impact performance. (Myth: The EA professional will force me to answer personal and intrusive questions.) EAO consultants do not force the employee to answer questions. However, questions will be asked that are related to the initial concern(s) presented. (Myth: Going to the EAO will be a promotion-killing black mark on my record.) Let the employee know that records of EAO attendance are confidential and not kept in personnel files.

■ **I know praising employees for their good work reinforces repeat performances. I want to be positive with my employees. Can you give me tips on how to use praise more effectively—perhaps in ways that aren’t commonly understood?**

A less considered yet powerful way to use praise more effectively is to do so not only after a task is completed but also as you delegate a task. For example, suppose your work unit is giving a presentation to top management about last year’s activities. You want Mary to deliver the presentation. Consider praising her while you delegate the assignment by stating, “I would like you to take the lead on this executive presentation. I know that with your organizational skills and gift for public speaking, you will do a fabulous job and make a great impression for our work unit.” Notice that you not only praise Mary for her ability to do a great job, but you reference specifics associated with her public speaking proficiency and organizational skills. This leverages your praise to make it effective. Employees who are praised in this manner feel more energetic in advance of the assignments, and they sharpen their focus to go the extra mile with better products or outcomes.

■ **I am trying to do a better job at delegating work. Are there any important points about delegating assignments to employees that help ensure work will**

When supervisors delegate, they often neglect a few key points needed to make delegation a process of growth, not just an assigned task. Your goal in delegating is to get work accomplished and also to expand your employee’s capabilities. Unless key steps are taken, many problems can ensue with delegation, the most significant of which is the inability to let go of control. Instead of monitoring progress, you are compelled to meddle

be done with superior results?

and thereby frustrate your worker. To help ensure better delegation: 1) Explain the assignment and what you anticipate as a successful or satisfactory outcome. 2) Explain the importance of the assignment to the organization and how your employee will grow from the experience. 3) Monitor to show an interest in the outcome, but monitor less on the details of the project. 4) Make sure your employee has everything needed to produce the expected outcome—resources, accountability, authority, etc.

■ **How do I manage employees who are not poor performers yet take up an inordinate amount of my time? Examples are needing a lot of attention to understand assignments, being too emotional when faced with small irritations, etc. It's hard to quantify these issues.**

Many undesirable employee behaviors or performance issues are not easily found on a performance evaluation checklist. The easiest way to overcome this problem is to meet with your HR Rep for a consult. Decide together on the right description of your employee's behavior and—more importantly—how to quantify or measure it so it can be documented. Then the EAO can offer constructive communication and corrective interviewing techniques that will likely work. You can assume there are strategies to correct many undesirable employee behaviors with the help of a referral.

■ **Can the EAO serve as a witness in my meeting with an employee so that later, if problems return and serious disciplinary action is contemplated, the EAO's credibility and neutrality can attest to the fair treatment given to the troubled employee?**

Although there are no standards of practice that would directly prohibit the EAO from participating in a meeting of this type, it would be ill-advised. Using the EAO to support management's interests in this way would conflict with the EAO's true purpose. An EAO is an "office of attraction" that uses confidentiality and neutrality to draw troubled employees to it. The type of meeting you are suggesting could damage the EAO's credibility and thereby taint the EAO's position of neutrality. Employees could easily perceive the EAO as an advocate for management, decreasing its utilization. It is more useful to have another manager or management advisor in such a meeting and to document the meeting well. It is important for the EAO to remain both confidential and neutral when consulting with employees.

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