

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource -- Employees

BluePrint for Health® Employee Assistance Program 651-662-0900 or 1-800-432-5155

■ **Our organization will lose nearly 15 percent of its employees in a planned downsizing this year. Should I anticipate that productivity will be negatively affected, and if so, is there anything I can do about it? Will employees simply not care about productivity this year?**

Anger and anxiety will play powerful roles and may affect some employees' productivity as they seek to cope with the uncertainty of downsizing. Many supervisors assume that all employees will suffer a lack of productivity when downsizing looms and anxiety grows, but this is not necessarily the case. Productivity may increase for some employees. These will tend to be employees who have a high level of insecurity about their positions, but who also have a high need to work. In other words, those who can afford to lose their jobs the least may demonstrate more productivity than usual. On the other hand, downsizing anxiety may adversely affect the productivity of employees who have a low need to work. Offering support and effectively planning communication as downsizing is implemented is important for both groups, regardless of anticipated productivity levels, because the personal reaction of each employee cannot be predicted or generalized to a larger group.

■ **The past few years have been difficult between me and my employee. The relationship is in the pits. He and I snap at each other, our voice tones are inappropriate, we do not exchange civilities, and frankly, I will fire him the next wrong move he makes. Any advice?**

Talk to the EAP fast. The conflict between you and your employee is a risk issue for your organization, and it is a stressor that you must manage better. Unresolved and festering anger can be a hair trigger for violence, lawsuits, theft, property damage, and unpredictable productivity problems. Many supervisors treat ongoing mutual resentment between themselves and employees they supervise as personal matters, but in fact they pose risks for the organization. Between you and EAP professional, decide on a course of mediation that will improve the relationship. You may feel it's too late, but if you are willing to try, your employee may also participate. A meeting with the EAP will likely be attractive to your employee so he can vent and explain his side of the story. You will predictably notice an immediate improvement in the interaction between you and your employee after these initial steps. But that won't last long if you don't pursue the opportunity for resolving your differences with the help of the EAP.

■ **I witnessed two employees in our warehouse making a sexually provocative comment to the secretary who works there. I gave them the evil eye and I'm sure they got the message loud and clear. It was a first-time incident. Should I have done more?**

Yes, you should have said more just as you would to an employee smoking beside a fuel pump. A facial gesture will not prove that you corrected the behavior and it won't demonstrate adequately your disapproval of it. You can decide on the corrective response, but the goal is to protect the victim, act so that the incident is not repeated, and document it. You will then be on solid ground if you are ever officially asked about it. This is probably not the first incident. Let the victimized employee know that you heard the comment and addressed it, and encourage this employee to come to you with any concerns relative to coworkers' inappropriate behavior. State that you will not tolerate disrespect in the workplace or harassment of any type. Make note of this meeting. This is not overreacting. Employers are now in the hot seat when it comes to issues of sexual harassment and must act to protect employees and the employer.

■ **What is the key issue in leadership often overlooked by supervisors that can undermine their attempt to achieve workplace goals and build a cohesive team?**

A key leadership skill is identifying the skills and talents of employees and motivating them to use those skills in the pursuit of organizational goals. Effective leaders invest in developing constructive working relationships with their employees, and they help them apply their talents in the pursuit of those goals. Behaviors that demonstrate effective leadership skills are both learned and naturally part of some supervisors' personalities, but the investment by the leader in authentically meeting the needs of the team is what promotes loyalty and motivates followers (employees). The payoff for effective leadership is acquiring influence. Many supervisors reverse this process or miss part of it in their pursuit of becoming a leader. They focus more, or too much on, achieving goals, while neglecting the needs of employees on whom they rely. Leaders will not generate loyalty without also developing meaningful relationships with the employees they supervise.

■ **I am very stressed out in my supervisor role. I would like to relax and physically work off my stress, but I have never noticed any benefit when I hop on the treadmill as I attempt to relieve stress. As a result, I don't keep up with it.**

Physical activity is one of the best ways to relieve stress but don't expect much if you only begin to exercise when you're already stressed out. For real benefits, you must make a commitment to a regular program of it, say 20-30 minutes a day consistently, with your doctor's approval. (Be sure to warm up before putting exercise stress on your heart.) If you keep up with your exercise program, you will experience better capability and resilience when you are under stress in the future. This is called stress immunization.

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