

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN. Employee Assistance Program 651-662-0900 or 1-800-432-5155

■ How can I support employees who remain after downsizing? Many relationships were lost, and grief and anger exist. Will this situation eventually right itself? Perhaps I should make myself scarce because I represent management, the target of their anger.

Do not make yourself scarce. You have the ability to influence employee attitudes and improve morale by what you say, do, and don't do. If employees are angry and upset, you will ratchet up their feelings of resentment by avoiding them. Likewise, coping with your stress by hiding out will also backfire. Healing will take time, but remember that you and your employees want the same thing—a happier workplace. With that in mind, get closer to your employees by accepting in the short run their view of themselves as survivors. As a manager, you take center stage after downsizing, and employees are waiting and watching to see if you demonstrate compassion and understanding. This is crucial to their recovery. Employees can then move to the next stage of adaptation and acceptance of change. Never declare that employees should “get over it.” Discuss with the EAP how to encourage activities that rebuild the feeling of commitment workers have toward the organization.

■ I feel insecure about my position. I don't seem to be able to get my point across to upper management, gain their acceptance for my ideas, or satisfy them. Can the EAP help me?

Many supervisors struggle with uncertainty about their abilities and relationships with management. EAPs can help because they observe best practices in communication and become sensitive to the nuances of work culture. They provide tips, techniques, guidance, and “know-how” to help supervisors improve their effectiveness. So give the EAP a try. You may discuss many topics like how to analyze issues from upper management's perspective or how to use empathy to deepen your understanding of the boss's outlook. You may discover which part of your operation management cares about the most, what pressures they face, and how they define success. You may learn to avoid mistakes like bringing only ideas and excitement to a meeting, to avoid making assertions without proof, and also to not take the rejection of your ideas personally but rather as a challenge to discover missing pieces that will help you win acceptance of your ideas.

■ My employee does not follow through on assignments that I delegate. When I ask why, the employee says it is “busywork.” I want to refer this individual to the EAP, but I'm open-minded. Perhaps I have delegation all wrong. How do I know for sure?

It's not hard to determine whether you are delegating work to your employee or simply piling on tasks that you need done. Many supervisors do not know the difference. Employees often do, as signified by their reaction to what (and how) things land in their laps. Ask yourself if the assignment you are delegating frees you up to do what matters most. Do you spend time training and motivating employees regarding the assignments given to them? If you're just anticipating a due date, that's not delegation. Delegation will test your communication skills. Encouragement; delivery of praise for a job well done; and provision of tools, resources and authority are often necessary in the delegation process. What about goals, timetables, and expectations? Have you explained the importance of the assignment and how you will measure success? With delegation, both you and your employee grow from the experience.

■ I gave a copy of my documentation (a list of issues) to my employee and made a referral to the EAP. The employee became upset when I said the list had already been faxed confidentially to the EAP. Is this just manipulation?

Consider your EAP policy and the steps your organization wants you to follow when making a supervisor referral. Obviously the employee was taken aback, but sending your documentation to support the rationale for the referral is consistent and customary with the EAP process. Even so, you want employees to feel motivated to participate in the EAP, so sending the information after your meeting, even though you don't need permission, is probably a better way to go. Remember, an EAP without information from the supervisor relies solely upon what the employee-client reports. Let the EAP know about this reaction because it will help the EAP to set the employee at ease at the first appointment.

■ Can you describe in simple terms how to meet and confront an employee with performance problems so the interview is effective?

Meet with your employee in private about the issue or concern. Describe what happened from your perspective. Never become agitated or aggressive with your employee. As the employee for his or her account or explanation of the behavior, action, or performance shortcoming. Inform the employee about the negative effects of the performance shortcoming. Inform the employee about the negative effects of the performance issue on productivity and on the workplace. Ask the employee if there is anything else that explains the continuation of performance problems. Provide feedback or make a statement regarding what is commendable about the employee's performance. (This piece is often overlooked by supervisors, but can motivate employees to improve performance.) Inform the employee that his or her current performance is not acceptable. Describe what you want done differently, what must change, and when those changes must occur. Let the employee know the ultimate outcome if performance does not change or improve. Remind the employee about the EAP or incorporate a supervisor referral as appropriate.

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