

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

■ We have a new supervisor who comes with a great reputation, but some employees feel she is too pushy and “on task.” I wasn’t hearing these complaints with the last supervisor. Maybe she is a bad fit, or perhaps it is others who need to be more like her. Should I just let her go and return to the status quo?

This conflict is **not** desirable, but it may signal the need for some employees to make changes. Instead of focusing on how to return to the status quo, recognize that this scenario may signal an opportunity that offers rewards to your organization. Discourage complainers to end running to you during this adjustment period, and be aware that even a passing “hallway venting session” with you by employees could undermine motivation for them to work toward cooperating with her. Encourage your new supervisor to use the EAP—not because she is actually creating problems, but for guidance on gaining acceptance for her supervision style. The EAP will help her determine how to proceed in managing differences with her subordinates. In the end, this approach will allow the best chance for a “win-win” solution. You will be able to capitalize on your investment in hiring her and help those under her supervision make the changes needed to improve their performance and productivity.

■ Our company’s supervisors recently attended a presentation on workplace substance abuse and were told marijuana was addictive. I do not know anyone who ever became addicted to marijuana. So what is the real story on how dangerous this drug truly is (or is not)?

The **medical professionals** who are the most knowledgeable about marijuana are addiction medicine physicians who specialize in the treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) has 4000 of these physicians as its members. Their clinical work and research support the policies and positions they publish on controversial subjects such as marijuana. ASAM’s public policy on marijuana was last updated May 2006. You can look it up at www.asam.org. ASAM states that marijuana is “a dangerous drug with harmful effects.” Addiction to it is classified as “the disease of marijuana dependence.” According to these experts, marijuana requires some addicts to smoke four times as much as they once did to get the desired effect. Withdrawal symptoms can last two to four weeks, and may be so severe that medical support and detoxification is required to overcome cravings. Like alcohol, not everyone becomes addicted to marijuana. Similarly, a user’s past experience with the drug will influence the believability about its addictive potential.

■ The EAP provides short-term problem solving and counseling, but it refers people to psychotherapy. What’s the difference between the two?

Counseling is distinctly different from psychotherapy, which is why mental health licensure and appropriate certification is required to practice psychotherapy in virtually every state. Counseling is problem solving; it is often a discussion between a counselor and a client that addresses an individual’s concerns or struggles associated with life’s problems or issues. Psychotherapy is treatment for emotional problems where the relationship with the psychotherapist is a means (a tool) to help the client or patient make difficult changes in behavior, beliefs, and habits of thinking to improve their life functioning. Most people who go to therapy do so after experiencing much personal distress because the way they have always coped with or responded to life’s problems (especially conflicts in relationships) is no longer working.

■ 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 impostor 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'm 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 EAP for more support.

■ A young worker who I recently hired is energetic, inquisitive, accepts feedback, and has great ideas. Unfortunately, my office manager doesn't like her and is making comments about quitting. I am afraid of losing my office manager (who has been with me for 26 years!) because I am dependent on her. How do I resolve this personality clash?

There is more to this problem than a personality clash. It appears that your older worker feels threatened by the younger employee and is resorting to the threat of resignation to manipulate you into reining in the younger employee. This is not an unusual workplace conflict, but its resolution will elude you until you take charge as the senior manager. After 26 years, you have naturally grown dependent on a very competent office manager, who seems irreplaceable. Your fear of losing her represents leverage to control you, and she is taking advantage of it. This dynamic probably did not emerge overnight. Consider whether you have reinforced this behavior by your reaction to similar threats in the past. The EAP can help, and the starting point will be assistance in helping you face the uncertain outcome of reasserting your authority, helping you take back the power you have given away to your subordinate, and freeing you from living in fear of what your employee will do if you don't please her. Afterwards, conflict resolution assistance can proceed.

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