

# 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

■ I am not the only supervisor who dreads performance reviews, but is there a way I can make better use of them during the year rather than simply churning them out annually and saying good-bye to the employee until next year?

Performance reviews and performance management systems are powerful productivity processes that can help drive an organization's achievements through the roof. But when not used to their full potential, performance reviews can instead become a burden to both supervisor and supervisee. At the very least, use employee reviews as springboards for discussions with your employees about their goals and aspirations. Discover the degree of inspiration your employees possess to do their best work, and learn how to increase it. Chances are that you will discover something you did not know about your employees' needs that, if met, would better serve the organization's mission and goals. Also, be sure to let your employees hear from you firsthand the importance of what they are doing and how it fits with the organization's mission. All employees look and hope for pay increases, but hearing that they personally are valued fulfills a level of need that the paycheck won't reach.

■ My employee is very smart and capable, but this person is not producing the quality of work I expect. I'm starting to feel a little like a broken record harping on productivity. Completed projects continue to disappoint me. Is it time for a supervisor referral?

Typically, if your reasonable attempts to correct performance have not worked, that's a signal to consider a referral to the EAP. Before doing so, consider whether you have used appropriate management tools. For example, proper accountability is frequently overlooked by managers although they think it exists. For example, have you set up a procedure in which your employee is obligated to report decisions to you and justify those decisions and actions as they occur? Do you have a mutual understanding about the consequences of failure to meet certain defined outcomes? This is also called "transparency" in supervision. Negative feedback (and positive) should not follow only after the fact, but should be offered before decisions are made and undesirable outcomes are produced. Accountability and transparency in supervision relationships change the mindset of employees and for many are all that's required to produce the results managers expect but never thought they'd see.

■ On break, I saw my employee come out of a package store. I did not see a purchase. My understanding is that this employee is in recovery from alcoholism since his referral to the EAP several months ago. Should I say something to him or the EAP?

Like any employee, you have the freedom to contact the EAP for any reason you feel appropriate. Although many concerned persons would react with alarm to what you have seen, realize that your focus should remain on the employee's performance and that you don't have enough information to make an accurate judgment about what you have seen. Your call to the EAP will be treated confidentially. Don't expect the EAP to provide details of your employee's treatment or say what will happen with the information you share. Focusing on performance is the surest way to help your employee to not only be a good performer, but to also follow through with whatever his or her program of recovery entails. Remember, you can't control the employee's behavior or outcomes in his or her personal life. Realize, too, that events such as this one frequently have simple explanations. For example, your employee in recovery may have had second thoughts and simply left the store, paid an old debt, or said good-bye to the clerk he never plans to see again.

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■ What makes a good manager of employees? What common traits do the best managers possess?

The Gallop Organization has examined this issue quite thoroughly through a massive in-depth survey based on interviews and studies they conducted with about 80,000 managers. They arrived at a set of four characteristics worth knowing and thinking about. What is interesting is that “attitude” of the supervisor is directly or closely associated with three out of the four. That’s an argument for examining any personal issues and how they help or impede your ability to be a good manager. Supervisors have a resource to help them address these issues — the EAP! The four common denominators are wanting to see employees grow and succeed; matching the right people with the right roles; defining desired outcomes while being willing to give people the latitude to accomplish them in their own ways; and focusing on what’s best in people, not what’s worst. (M.Buckingham and C. Coffman, 1999, *First, Break All the Rules: What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently.*)

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■ I didn’t get a very good rating on my performance evaluation as a supervisor. I don’t think I need to get help, but can the EAP discuss my supervision issues, style, and how I come across with employees? Is this appropriate, or is the EAP for bigger problems?

The EAP is for the big problems and the little ones, but each is important. Seeking guidance with your supervision style fits perfectly within the official description of what EAPs do. It includes providing “consultation with, training of, and assistance to work organization leadership (managers, supervisors, and union stewards) seeking to manage the troubled employee, enhance the work environment, and improve employee job performance.” It’s very tough to be objective and analytical about your own supervision style. It is much easier for someone else. Sometimes consultants are able to point out issues that are very obvious even though we cannot see them at first. That’s the basis for consulting on any topic or specialty area.

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