

# 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 was promoted from among my coworkers because I had the best work record. I don't think I need supervisory courses. I think I am "a natural." I know how to keep a crew of people in line. It is all common sense, right?

A history of successful interaction with coworkers may lead you to believe that you possess the full range of skills necessary to manage them. However, an issue making you hesitate could be your fear of being vulnerable enough to admit that there is more to learn about supervision. This same issue can translate into problems in your supervision style on the job because it indicates that you may have difficulty putting your ego aside, accepting compromise, showing patience, nurturing others, managing conflict, or making decisions that will test your leadership ability. These stressors are routine for active supervisors. Once you are in a position of authority, your attitudes about supervision and leadership, beliefs on what motivates others, and other personal issues will influence your decisions. Without training you will be less self-aware about how these factors may interfere with your role, and thereby increase your risk to the organization.

■ One of my employees has complained that a coworker of his is a bully. He cites numerous examples, but I am not so sure the complaints add up to much. Should I refer a bully to the EAP? Should I ignore these types of interpersonal issues?

You should listen to your employee's complaints, keep a record of these discussions, investigate, and correct inappropriate behavior brought to your attention by others. Also, make a supervisor referral to the EAP if your documentation supports it. Just as you would handle complaints of sexual harassment, establish a record of being proactive against bullying behavior rather than ignoring or dismissing it. Bullying continues to be a workplace issue, although media attention to the problem fluctuates. One growing threat is the call by legal advocacy groups to hold employers financially responsible for bullying behavior. Some of these groups are conducting research to determine the frequency of bullying behavior and gauge the interest employees have in suing their employers. These groups argue that bullying behavior frequently falls outside normal legal protections like those for discrimination, harassment, and other employment rights violations.

■ I am trying to get my employees to buy into the mission and the vision that I have for our work unit. I have a couple of employees who are not cooperative. Their skills are acceptable, but they act like wet blankets. Can I refer them to the EAP?

A wide spectrum of behaviors constitutes job performance. These entail quality of work as well as attitude and conduct on the job. If it is consistent with your performance evaluation and review process, consider incorporating measurable ways of evaluating attitude, cooperation, and enthusiasm so they are meaningful in the evaluation. Often these performance factors are not well defined on an evaluation form. Why not define what they mean before the evaluation period? You will discover that this is a powerful approach if you try it. If a positive attitude is desired, what demonstrates it? What does not? A thesaurus is helpful for finding action words for your definition. Be fair about applying these measures to everyone. You should see attitudes change because you have now properly linked attitude to performance. If behavior does not respond to your corrective approaches, then consider use of the EAP.

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■ This year I am determined to improve the level of respect employees show each other in our company. Beyond policies and work rules, what is a key strategy to positively influence change?

Maintaining a respectful workplace is a growing concern for businesses, but what many people do not realize is that much disrespect is not premeditated. Instead, it is reflective of a lack of self-control, education, fear, and the influence of personal biases. Supporting a work culture where employees actively discourage disrespectful behavior toward each other by pointing it out as it happens is a powerful change strategy. Beyond formal training, actively encourage and support a respectful workplace where employees can point it out. Make it a tradition because a respectful workplace is everyone's responsibility. This approach will raise the level of awareness for preventing disrespectful behavior.

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■ Can the EAP help me consider my approach to gently confronting employees with bad breath, someone who smells bad from what they eat, or has some other bad habits or personal matters like body odor, so that I don't offend the employee?

The key roadblock to discussing an annoying personal habit or behavior with an employee is imagining how horrible you would feel when confronting the employee, along with the shock on the employee's face when the issue is raised. Fortunately, most supervisors discover that this fear is overblown, that instead of acting offended and horrified, the employee is grateful and thankful. Usually there is a business reason for requesting that an employee alter an annoying behavior or change a disagreeable habit. The key is being able to identify it, articulate it, and link it to your request. The EAP can help with this process and add some role playing if you think it may be helpful. Generally, the business rationale is a requirement that the employee cooperate with the cultural standards of the workplace or how behaviors or habits directly affect the business and productivity.

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