

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

■ After consulting with the EAP, I decided not to terminate my employee for cause. My manager, however, strongly disagrees with my decision. Should we meet with the EAP to discuss our disagreement? This is important, and I think the EAP will help my supervisor see my point.

There is no reason why you and your supervisor can't meet with the EAP to discuss this issue, but it concerns important role issues that the EAP will keep in mind and that you should also heed. Do not expect the EAP to take a position on the disciplinary decision or attempt to influence your supervisor's decision through persuasion. Doing so would extend the EAP's influence beyond the scope of its purpose and create shared responsibility for the outcome. Also, remember that you and your supervisor are not "equals" in position or authority. Conflict resolution can be effective, but it can also be problematic if it creates a playing field where this distinction is ignored or undermined. This could leave a negative impression on management and its future willingness to rely on the EAP as a reliable resource for assistance.

■ I have read about the value of soft skills. I agree that they are essential. But how do I discover employees who possess them? Some previous employers don't give references, so you don't know until it's too late that a new hire can't maintain effective relationships.

You're right, it is difficult to see evidence of well-honed soft skills by looking at a resume. Proficiency can be difficult to gauge because soft skills are dependent upon one's attitude, self-image, and relationship skills. Comparing answers candidates give to open-ended questions in job interviews can help. A team of interviewers is the best choice to prepare and ask questions because of the subjective nature of the answers. Judging the "best" response can build consensus. Remember to formulate questions to cause the person to "open up" and explain what he or she would do in response to a work situation. Start questions with how, what, and why. Remember to ask questions using scenarios that underscore important aspects of work and, just as important, your unique work culture. Talk to your HR experts to learn more.

■ My employee reports concern about an individual believed to be a stalker. I am glad the employee came to me, because I want to be supportive. Can you offer suggestions on managing this issue?

Review your organization's policy on violence in the workplace, if one exists, to ensure that you follow established procedures. Meet with your manager or key managers and human resources to discuss the issue, and determine the safety concerns to address. Suggest that your employee contact the EAP for support and guidance. You're smart not to ignore this complaint. Too frequently, stalking is perceived as just another personal problem like marital conflict or troubles with a teenager. Stalking is a serious crime with significant risks, especially for women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace and one out of eight homicides is from a stalker. Key issues to discuss include how to respond to restraining orders, whether other employees should be informed, the role of the police, etc.

■ Has the importance of maintaining high employee morale changed in the current business environment versus the past? And what are the implications regarding my role in keeping morale high?

High morale has always been important, but it's "why" high morale is important that has changed. Understanding this change can help you keep morale high and ensure that you do not demotivate employees. Modern society has moved to an information and service economy. More than ever before, the assets of the majority of employers in this modern age are the ideas, innovation, creativity, experience, complex skills, and intelligence of workers. Decay of these assets from low morale will cause any modern organization to lose ground to the competition. In the past, when the economy was fueled by industry, production, and distribution systems, high morale helped retain hardworking employees, but there has been a shift in the profile of the typical worker. Rather than forcing established methods and production schedules on employees, employers now rely on their resourcefulness, creativity, and innovative thinking. Maintaining a well-nurtured workforce that sticks around, produces ideas, innovates, and grows its skills is vital to your economic survival, now more than ever.

■ My employee is hospitalized following a suicide attempt and has asked me to visit. Discharge is in a few days. I don't want to visit this person at a psychiatric unit. I want to be supportive, but frankly, I don't feel comfortable with the request. Should I go anyway?

Visiting an employee in a hospital is not an uncommon event for supervisors, but since it is probably not related to an essential function of your position, it's reasonable to use your own judgment about what to do. There are other ways to express your sentiments, and a get-well card is certainly the most conventional and appropriate. If you remain unsure about what to do and would like to consider visiting, discuss your ambivalence with the EAP. You will gain clarity, and you will feel better about whatever decision you make.

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