

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

■ Last year our office held a holiday party at a hotel. A lot of employees, including me, drank quite a bit. No one drove home, but I worried the next day whether this kind of socializing harmed my image as a manager. Is it okay to socialize with employees in this manner?

It is important to set a good example for your employees and to have effective relationships with them that can positively influence their productivity. Overdrinking at a holiday party is not consistent with these goals beyond the other risks of such an event. Socializing with employees can be risky. A debate still rages among experts about how familiar supervisors should be with their employees. Some argue for avoiding any outside social interaction. Others say just the opposite. Would hosting a baby shower or a fishing trip for your work group be a problem? It might if your position of influence is damaged as a result. This can happen more easily than you might think. The necessary elevation of your position is reduced when employees possess knowledge about your personal life, which is more easily discovered or shared in social settings outside work. Before socializing with employees outside work, ask whether you risk damaging the perception employees have of you as a manager they respect. That perception is certainly what your employer wants.

■ I struggle to motivate some of my employees. I just can't seem to find the right combination of incentives. On the other hand, most of my employees are enthusiastic and produce well. As for the few employees who struggle, can you offer any tips on motivating them?

Much has been written about motivation and how to get employees excited about their work. All this has been to the benefit of employees and work organizations. But there has been a downside: the mistaken belief by managers that all employees can be motivated and incentive-induced to become top performers, and if they can't, the manager is to blame. Once you have taken all reasonable steps to provide an effective and productive work environment, the rest is up to your employees. Your organization is in partnership with employees, who must ultimately take the ball you hand them and run with it. Some will perform well and others will not. Many supervisors are too hard on themselves as they struggle to find the secret to motivating all employees all the time. The best type of motivation is self-motivation.

■ I am a new supervisor. Can you advise me on what behaviors to avoid that upset employees most, but which they are not likely to complain about until they have grown angry and resentful?

Help your employees by avoiding the following classic behaviors that will upset them, but which you are not likely to hear many complaints about until employees are completely fed up: 1) Asking employees to involve themselves with a project or task and then suddenly asking them to stop it and jump to another. 2) Proclaiming the tasks that you ask employees to take on as emergencies that need to be addressed immediately. 3) Correcting employees in front of their peers. 4) Promising anything you're not certain of to employees in order to boost their morale, then later apologizing that you "couldn't get it approved." 5) Accepting credit from top management for projects completed by your staff, and then explaining to your staff that you had accepted thanks on their behalf. 6) Making inappropriate jokes, remarks, or innuendos. Most of these behaviors have one prevention technique: being aware of how you use the power naturally afforded by your position.

■ My employee does not remember what I asked her to do. She responds to questions with weird answers unrelated to the topic. She drives our vehicles, so I am worried about safety. Our company has a fitness-for-duty procedure, but should I consult with the EAP before I act on it?

Fitness-for-duty policies include information and steps to guide supervisors in acting on them. Use these to decide whether to act. Consult with your HR advisor, if needed, so you are completely clear on the necessary steps and can document that you acted responsibly. If the EAP is part of your fitness-for-duty evaluation and return-to-work process, the formal EAP referral and fitness-for-duty referral may be on step. If not, you could make a separate supervisor referral to the EAP using documentation to support it. The EAP will make an assessment and, depending on its outcome, choose appropriate resources to further evaluate your employee's needs and/or coordinate its efforts with the fitness-for-duty process.

■ Three of my employees argue and bicker with each other, and I am interested in having the EAP help resolve this conflict. I have identified one of the employees as the "troublemaker." Should I refer them individually, as a group, or just the one employee mentioned?

There are no **hard-and-fast rules** about a supervisor referral of the type you describe, but experience shows that referring each of these employees separately based upon the performance issues you have documented can produce good results. Supervisor referrals should be based on individual employees' issues, not the group's issues, because each employee reacts differently to this conflict and each has a different story to tell. Also, this approach better conforms to EAP standards. Each of your employees has a role to play in the resolution of the conflict, even if one employee is more provocative. After an initial assessment, the EAP may choose to work with your employees as a group, individually, or both. Consult with the EAP before making the referral.

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