

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

April 2007

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource--Employees

Q. *One of my concerns about seeking consultative help from the EAP is that I will be “analyzed” or that my past decisions will be scrutinized if I just want to talk about the problems I am having with an employee. Should I be concerned?*

A. EAPs would quickly lose their support from supervisors if, upon visiting, the supervisors felt as though they were under a microscope. The employee assistance professional may ask you questions about your interaction with your employee to determine what has and has not worked in your attempts to correct performance. You may feel self-conscious about sharing this information if you have struggled to turn things around without much success. However, the EAP’s focus is on what you want to accomplish—not on analyzing you. Don’t hesitate to discuss how you can become a better supervisor. EAP professionals have, as their fundamental purpose, the role of helping supervisors. In fact, in their own “core technology” (a set of officially recognized components that define the profession), consultation with supervisors and management is mentioned first.

Q. *Should I come to the EAP with my employee for conflict resolution? He and I are always at each other’s throats. I think it would be useful, because he could discover that I am right. For this reason, I don’t fear conflict resolution.*

A. Although it may initially sound like a good idea to engage the EAP in conflict

resolution with your employee, to do so puts you and your employee on equal footing, and it can make matters worse. Many supervisors do not like the feelings associated with power, authority, and control. They compensate by trying to negotiate, be friends, or act “equal” to their subordinates. This can have a powerful enabling effect because it gives employees choice in whether they will accept direction. Because supervisors must perform their jobs, conflict ensues. You are not equal to your employee. You are superior in your responsibilities to the organization, and you must lead. It is better to go solo to the EAP and work out how you will gain back the control your organization wants you to have so you can accomplish its goals.

Q. *I consider myself very assertive, and I think it has helped me get ahead. However, in a recent off-site workshop, I learned that my colleagues feel I am too assertive. I was surprised, but is there a balance?*

A. “Assertiveness is like salt in a sauce,” according to researcher Daniel Ames, Ph.D., of Columbia Business School. “Nobody notices a problem with assertiveness unless there is too much or too little of it.” Aspiring leaders who are low on assertiveness can’t stand up for their interests, and they suffer by being ineffective at achieving goals and delivering results. On the other hand, people with too much assertiveness may get their way, but only by choking off the relationships around them. Over time, the social costs undermine their efforts. Effective leaders push hard enough to get their way, but not so hard they can’t get along. Awareness is your best

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weapon in the pursuit of control over assertiveness. Being able to ratchet it up and down as necessary is a valuable skill. Talk to the EAP about your assertiveness style. You will find an objective listener and get advice from someone who is not competing with you.

Q. *In my pursuit of being the best manager I can be, my biggest challenge has been seeing problems before they happen—identifying early trouble in the decisions made by those I supervise. Is this an art or a skill?*

A. As you manage employees over time, you may feel uncertain about the course of action or solution offered by an employee. You're not predicting the future. Instead, your accumulated knowledge is working for you to create uncertainty, causing you to act. This is a skill. Unfortunately, for most managers, these sensations may be so subtle as to be dismissed; so, the challenge is spotting them and acting on them earlier. Train yourself to gauge your level of certainty or uncertainty sooner, rather than learning from costly mistakes. Ask the following: "How certain is my employee about what he or she is doing or proposing?" "What do I need to do, say, or ask in order to get past these feelings of uncertainty?" "Has this employee answered all of my questions, or are the answers incomplete or skirted?" Avoid accepting solutions to problems you know aren't viable with the idea of fixing problems later if they occur.



*Information contained in **The Frontline Supervisor** is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or HR management concern. For specific guidance call AWP.*

AWP Training Opportunities

AWP is a proven entity known for its training and curriculum development. AWP trainers are among the best training professionals in the business. We use PowerPoint and participant manuals/handouts supported by instructor manuals for each training topic. To provide training is a great way to promote the EAP to employees. For scheduling, contact your local HR coordinator or AWP account manager.

Featured Training



Managing the Challenge of Change

Every day we see more signs of change in the workplace. Planning for worker response is critical to the successful implementation of any major change. While workplace change can happen in an instant, the people involved will take some time to adapt. In the traditional workplace, leaders were vested with power by their position and seniority. In today's world, a leader is anyone who can persuade through consensus. Anyone in an organization may be responsible for implementing a change and managing the process. Today's leader is more of a coach or team player than an authoritarian. Supporting others as they go through this process demands strong communication skills.

This seminar will provide supervisors and managers with the skills they need to successfully manage change in the workplace. It will also provide the strength and leadership they need to help employees embrace change.

(AWP) offers supervisors confidential, unlimited consultation with experienced EAP professionals.

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