

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

February 2007

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

***Q. Our organization will lose nearly 15 percent of its employees in a planned downsizing this year. Should I anticipate that productivity will be negatively affected, and if so, is there anything I can do about it? Will employees simply not care about productivity this year?***

**A.** Anger and anxiety will play powerful roles and may affect some employees' productivity as they seek to cope with the uncertainty of downsizing. Many supervisors assume that all employees will suffer a lack of productivity when downsizing looms and anxiety grows, but this is not necessarily the case. Productivity may increase for some employees. These will tend to be employees who have a high level of insecurity about their positions but who also have a high need to work. In other words, those who can afford to lose their jobs the least may demonstrate more productivity than usual. On the other hand, downsizing anxiety may adversely affect the productivity of employees who have a low need to work. Offering support and effectively planning communication as downsizing is implemented is important for both groups, regardless of anticipated productivity levels, because the personal reaction of each employee cannot be predicted or generalized to a larger group.

***Q. The past few years have been difficult between me and my employee. The relationship is in the pits. He and I snap at each other, our voice tones are inappropriate, we do not exchange civilities, and, frankly, I will fire him the next wrong move he makes. Any advice?***

**A.** Talk to the EAP fast. The conflict between you and your employee is a risk issue for your organization, and it is a stressor that you must manage better. Unresolved and festering anger can be a hair trigger for violence, lawsuits, theft, property damage, and unpredictable productivity problems. Many supervisors treat ongoing mutual resentment between themselves and employees they supervise as personal matters, but in fact they pose risks for the organization. Between you and the employee assistance professional, decide on a course of mediation that will improve the relationship. You may feel it's too late, but if you are willing to try, your employee may also participate. A meeting with the EAP will likely be attractive to your employee so he can vent and explain his side of the story. You will predictably notice an immediate improvement in the interaction between you and your employee after these initial steps. But that won't last long if you don't pursue the opportunity for resolving your differences with the help of the EAP.

***Q. I witnessed two employees in our warehouse making a sexually provocative comment to the secretary who works there. I gave them the evil eye and I'm sure they got the message loud and clear. It was a first-time incident. Should I have done more?***

**A.** Yes, you should have said more just as you would to an employee smoking beside a fuel pump. A facial gesture will not prove that you corrected the behavior and it won't demonstrate adequately your disapproval of it. You can decide on the corrective response, but

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the goal is to protect the victim, act so that the incident is not repeated, and document it. You will then be on solid ground if you are ever officially asked about it. This is probably not the first incident. Let the victimized employee know that you heard the comment and addressed it, and encourage this employee to come to you with any concerns relative to coworkers' inappropriate behavior. State that you will not tolerate disrespect in the workplace or harassment of any type. Make note of this meeting. This is not overreacting. Employers are now in the hot seat when it comes to issues of sexual harassment and must act to protect employees and the employer.

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**Q. What is the key issue in leadership often overlooked by supervisors that can undermine their attempt to achieve workplace goals and build a cohesive team?**

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**A.** A key leadership skill is identifying the skills and talents of employees and motivating them to use those skills in the pursuit of organizational goals. Behaviors that demonstrate effective leadership skills are both learned and naturally part of some supervisors' personalities, but the investment by the leader in authentically meeting the needs of the team is what promotes loyalty and motivates followers (employees). The payoff for effective leadership is acquiring influence. Many supervisors reverse this process or miss part of it in their pursuit of becoming a leader. They focus more, or too much on, achieving goals, while neglecting the needs of employees on whom they rely. Leaders will not generate loyalty without also developing meaningful relationships with the employees they supervise.

*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.

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### ***Featured Training***



#### ***Dealing with Difficult Employees***

We often encounter difficult people in the workplace, at home and in public places.

Many situations involving difficult people can lead to frustration, hurt feelings, delays and relationship difficulties.

As managers and supervisors, our communication must be clear and planned so as to achieve goals while preventing complications. This workshop explores various methods to effectively identify and deal with difficult people in a professional and responsible manner. Participants will learn to recognize employee behavior patterns and learn coping tactics to aid in problem resolution. Additionally, participants will learn to determine what they can do to protect their organization and themselves from potential problems.



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

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