Employees– Your Most Valuable Resource

Frontline Supervisor

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KEAP
Kentucky Employee Assistance Program
A confidential source for Kentucky State Employees for help with personal and work-related concerns.

Kentucky Employee Assistance Program (502) 564-5788 or (800) 445-5327

■ One of my employees appears unmotivated to go the extra mile, which is unlike her peers. I can't diagnosis the problem, but what if the EAP could be helpful? There are no job problems, and I do consider her work more than satisfactory.

Something about this employee's work style is concerning you despite the satisfactory level of performance she is achieving. True, you don't have a reason to suggest the EAP or make a supervisor referral, but it doesn't mean that over the next few weeks or months you can't monitor work performance; inquire about her productivity level, satisfaction with the job, and interest in the work. Consider gathering observational data to support your inquiry about her motivation. This is not a diagnostic inquiry, but good supervision. Many supervisors have a gut-level impression that an employee suffers with some unknown personal problem. They can't and shouldn't use this impression to conduct a diagnostic assessment. However, this does not mean that the supervisor can't do anything with his or her sense of concern. In fact, it would be ill-advised to completely ignore these hunches. When you meet, the employee may share information in your meeting that leads you to suggest the EAP.

■ How can supervisors gain a better appreciation for the impact their behaviors have on those under their supervision?

The simple answer is: by having a close working relationship with your employees. Part of that relationship involves "checking in" on communication, interaction, and mutual understanding between each other. More broadly, learning about emotional intelligence (EI) is a way to appreciate human interaction and impact. In this context, you're able to monitor your emotions and recognize the emotions of others and label them properly, and use this information to guide your behavior and thinking. Many resources are available to introduce you to EI skill-building. Your EAP can point the way to these resources. Another awareness to appreciate is the "trickle down" effect of supervision. The supervisor-supervisee dynamic is so strong that it can affect family harmony. Supervisor interactions at work have been shown to create conflicts at home, and even lead to domestic violence. This indirect influence is referred to as "social undermining" and has been well-documented.

■ I know poor communication is the No. 1 key complaint in the results of employee surveys that

Other problems ranking up there but not as high as communication com plaints (which are mostly related to information flow from the top of the organization down) are lack of recognition and praise, lack of training and educational opportunities, lack of flexibility in work

been administered to respondents at work organizations. What other common problems lead to employee dissatisfaction with organizations?

schedules, and lack of authority given to employees. Having "more authority associated with a human need to want more control of one's work in some fashion or form. The key is avoiding feeling like a cog in a wheel. Target this sensation and you'll be on the right track. Consider how to improve communication, feedback, and recognition, and offer ways to insert training and educational opportunities into your employees' experiences at work. Stumped when it comes to how to so? Create a peer advisory or brainstorming group to discuss the issues. You'll be amazed at the ideas that will emerge from such an approach.

■ **I know supervisors who still ignore problem employees who should be confronted and referred to the EAP. Why is the EAP ignored, despite a supervisor being trained, being oriented to the EAP, understanding how it works, and being supportive of it?**

A supervisor's reluctance to incorporate the EAP in supervisory practices is often caused by a resistance to change, but this only partly explains the problem, because reduced supervisor stress results from using EAPs. Despite the warning not to do so, some supervisors prefer to be involved in resolving personal problems. This may lead to having after-hours counseling sessions, loaning money, talking to spouses, taking employees on social outings, or even having a drink with the employee at a bar "to talk things over." Most supervisors know this is not their role, but some derive personal satisfaction from getting involved. Unfortunately, chronic performance problems often have serious root causes. Many are beyond the supervisor or even employee's ability to perceive what they are and much less arrange treatment. Supervisors may revisit the same problem for years. Eventually, frustration mounts, leading to a desire to terminate the employee because he or she has been labeled "hopeless."

■ **What is the "Lone Ranger Syndrome" with regard to the supervisor's role in the workplace?**

The Lone Ranger Syndrome is a construct originally conceptualized by U.S. Department of Human Resources HR specialist Art Purvis in the mid-1970s, when EAPs were in a growth boom. In his work with supervisors, he often observed their reluctance to deal with their own personal problems of depression, anxiety, or struggles, which were made worse by the isolation in their position. Although supervisors might refer employees to the EAP, supervisors often believe they have to tough it out. Hence, the tendency for supervisors to help others while suffering in silence and going it alone led to the coining of the term. The message for supervisors is clear in the Lone Ranger Syndrome: Do not allow the job and its special stress to cause you to neglect your own health and wellness needs.

NOTES

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