

Frontline Supervisor



■ **I was promoted from among my coworkers because I had the best work record. I don't think I need supervisory courses. I think I am "a natural." I know how to keep a crew of people in line. It's all common sense, right?**

A **history of successful** interaction with coworkers may lead you to believe that you possess the full range of skills necessary to manage them. However, an issue making you hesitate could be your fear of being vulnerable enough to admit that there is more to learn about supervision. This same issue can translate into problems in your supervision style on the job because it indicates that you may have difficulty putting your ego aside, accepting compromise, showing patience, nurturing others, managing conflict, or making decisions that will test your leadership ability. These stressors are routine for active supervisors. Once you are in a position of authority, your attitudes about supervision and leadership, beliefs on what motivates others, and other personal issues will influence your decisions. Without training, you will be less self-aware about how these factors may interfere with your role, and thereby increase your risk to the organization. UW-Madison has a comprehensive resource available to new supervisors. Check www.talent.wisc.edu/catalog for *Fully Prepared to Manage: Principles of Supervision and Management*.

■ **My employee's work is good, and frankly, he is my best scientist. There is nothing to document regarding performance, but he has a bad attitude with his lack of humor, gruff style, isolation, and cynicism; he does not mesh well with the rest of the team. Can the EAO help?**

Yes, the EAO can help. You do have job performance issues to address and upon which you can base a referral. Rather than generalizing the issue as a "bad attitude," EAO can consult with you on useful language to consider in providing feedback to your employee. Appropriate language is critical when providing coaching or performance feedback. The task is to describe the manner in which your employee conducts himself, the interpersonal dynamics with his colleagues and most important, the impact on others. Describing the team's lower morale and increased conflict among co-workers, as well as the negative impact on his reputation, will support the concerns you are sharing with him. Asking for the employee's perspective may also reveal reasons behind his behavior that he may not have shared with you—and that may be resolvable.

■ **I recently read that anxiety is common among workers of all ages, especially younger workers. What performance or workplace symptoms would indicate an employee suffers with an anxiety disorder?**

Looking for mental health symptoms is not an appropriate way of identifying troubled employees from a management perspective. Focusing on performance standards you want to improve and considering a referral to the EAO is the way to go. There may be times when an employee shares with you that they have anxiety, depression or some other disorder. Your response should be to ask if a workplace accommodation is needed. It is also helpful to remind the person of the availability of supportive resources such as EAO and SilverCloud, an online resource for mental health and stress reduction. Many times, anxiety can be a reaction to life stressors. Promoting a healthy work environment by discouraging excessive work hours, skipping break or lunch times, and encouraging work/life balance benefits everyone in the organization.

■ **We are pushing this year to hire more veterans. It's the right thing to do, and we believe it will be a win-win. What are some of the key issues we should keep in mind after we begin hiring?**

Be proactive and communicate effectively with veterans. Surveys of Veterans who are employed in the civilian workforce find that most think their unique skills—ones that would directly help the employer—aren't fully or effectively used. When supervising vets, talk with them about their ideas, skills, and potential. Veterans are trained in taking or giving directions and then performing to their maximum ability. Today's participatory workplace may require more prompting to pull vets into them. If you are hiring vets, consider the special report (2015) that will aid you in maximizing your effectiveness in working with vets. It's called "Mission Critical: Unlocking the Value of Veterans in the Workforce." Find it at online bookstores. Don't forget to make the EAO available and have its message communicated to family members and spouses. They can help reach veterans if personal problems arise.

■ **After making a supervisor referral to the EAO, why is further communication about participation and cooperation necessary from the EAO? My concern is change or improved job performance. I either see it or I don't.**

Communicating with the supervisor following a referral for performance problems represents best practice for EAPs in managing troubled workers. It recognizes that employees are motivated, in part, to follow through because of concern over their job performance and career options. Lack of communication can reduce accountability on the part of the EAO client. An EAP is not primarily a counseling service. It is a programmatic approach to managing troubled workers whose performance issues may be caused by personal problems. The two approaches are radically different helping systems. The former is entirely apart from the workplace or any other system. An EAP, on the other hand, exists because of its primary business purpose: helping the workforce remain healthy and productive.