

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ How can I get more support from my boss?

Does getting support from your boss mean improving communication, having your boss take time to listen to your concerns and then assist you in solving problems or back you up on key decisions? Lack of support is a common complaint among supervisors, but the starting point is to understand your responsibility in the quality of the relationship that you have with your supervisor. Examine your communication style and habits. Do you regularly exchange information? Do you solicit your boss's perspective on issues you must resolve? Do you ask for the benefit of his or her experience as you manage tougher problems? Finally, do you directly ask for support? Many supervisors are reluctant to participate in an active relationship with their manager because it demands vulnerability, trust, authenticity, and other engagement skills. They want support, but they have not laid a foundation for easily obtaining it. Talk with the EAP. The EA professional will help you discover the steps you have not yet taken to a better relationship.

■ I had to initiate a disciplinary action, and my employee now gives me the cold shoulder. How do I address this passive anger that has suddenly appeared? Prior to the job action, an EAP referral was refused. I do not want to lose this employee

It is not unusual for an employee who has been disciplined to feel anger for receiving a disciplinary action, especially if he or she believes it was unwarranted or excessive. That may well be a majority of disciplined employees. How your employee responds to a disciplinary action is a performance issue, not simply a personal matter. You want effective communication and acceptable levels of productivity from your employee, but you won't attain these without complementary behaviors that make them possible. Meet with your employee and discuss his or her response to the disciplinary action. Define the response as a separate issue of concern. The objective is helping your employee deal constructively with the disciplinary action. Recommend the EAP again as a way to help him or her cope. Later, demonstrate your expectations for a positive and productive relationship going forward.

■ Is immaturity a performance issue that the EAP can address? My employee exhibits adolescent-like behaviors

Document the behavior and the time and place of these occurrences, and meet with your employee to insist that they end. Go through your list. Don't label the employee and be careful about deciding these behaviors simply point to "immaturity". The commonalities of these behaviors appear to be impulsivity and lack of self-control. Inability to exercise

such as interrupting, inappropriate laughing, joking, and creating minor annoyances that disrupt the quiet of the workplace. I don't see how that's "treatable."

■ My employee was injured on the job with use of the wrong tool. The truth is that it crossed my mind to stop him, but I dismissed the thought because I was so busy. Rather than blame myself, how do I reduce my stressful workload so I avoid a second occurrence?

■ I don't deny that stress is a significant issue for most workers, but I have never seen a report from our company or any company that links stress to direct costs for anything. So is stress overblown as a problem for business and industry? Where are the costs of stress?

self-control points to other issues. Regardless, the EAP can help. It is sometimes easy to label a set of behaviors or a pattern of behaviors in order to understand them better from your framework. This helps you decide what to do next in the way of a management or administrative decision. But labeling the employee as immature can unwittingly lead you to dismiss the usefulness of an EAP solution outright. That would be the wrong decision.

When we are busy and under stress, it is easy to ignore warning signs or dismiss decisions we should make that would preempt problems. The problem for you to tackle is not necessarily the stressful workload. Your goal should be to increase self-awareness. This will empower you to stop, think, and act when needed and to avoid using denial as a coping "tool" to reduce stress and remain uninvolved in critical decisions. When you are more self-aware, you can make intuitive decisions more easily in the middle of fast-moving, complex situations, where little structure exists and things appear ambiguous. You are able to pay closer attention to "gut feelings" that are less likely to be overshadowed by all the activity and hustle-bustle around you. There are many exercises for increasing self-awareness. You can search for them or talk to your EAP to learn more.

Although it is not possible to say "employee stress caused the loss of X dollars to our company," medical and social science research abounds with evidence that stress directly contributes to financial loss for employers. These costs tend to occur in four key areas: absenteeism, lost productivity, medical expenses, and turnover. Financial managers typically follow these financial costs closely, especially in larger companies. For example, stressed employees are more likely to stay home and take "mental health days" as a way to cope. Stress can cause health problems, of course, but it can also make existing health problems worse, especially preexisting autoimmune disorders. Did you know that stressed employees feel more powerless and are more likely to complain, file grievances, file lawsuits, have more accidents, make more errors, and experience more conflicts? The list goes on. When you see evidence of employees under stress, think "How can the EAP help?"

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