

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ **What is a “blame culture” as it applies to business and work settings?**

A “blame culture” exists when fear and blame are used to manage productivity issues resulting from problems and mistakes experienced by employees. In the book, *Stop the Blame Culture* (Gower Publishing Company, 1998), authors describe how a blame culture sabotages productivity by causing employees to seek conformity rather than opportunities that requires risk. Evading accountability and responsibility, and being able to quickly gather data to prove innocence becomes the corporate mindset. Reduced communication, reduced innovation, and inhibited entrepreneurial thinking result. Businesses can move away from a blame culture by changing the corporate mindset to establish new traditions that value learning and appreciation for mistakes as opportunities for improving productivity and innovation. This improves morale, increases energy, promotes positivity, and facilitates the achievement of ambitious goals.

■ **I have an employee who overly pleases. At any office party this employee will do all the work, make the food, serve people, and even clean up. Similar behavior occurs with regard to other matters. What can I do? Report her for “working too hard”? What causes this behavior?**

Social events at work are still business matters, so you have the latitude to request that their planning and execution be shared among employees. Think about the changes you would like this employee to make. Put them in writing, but consider meeting with the EAP to tighten up your list. Also discuss with the EAP what you are witnessing, so that the professional can get a better feel for the issues. A greater problem may exist. For example, your employee may be suffering from codependent behaviors that are well-established habits, and these could cause great distress in other areas, particularly in key relationships outside of work. Confusion and an inability to make changes may further contribute to other emotional issues. After meeting with your employee to discuss required changes, meet frequently to evaluate and reinforce any progress you see. Without changes, of course, be prepared to make a supervisor referral to the EAP.

■ **I have been a supervisor for 27 years. I recently hired an employee who acts like he knows more than I do**

You have a bright and precocious employee, but there appears to room for improvements in the communication style so there will be more receptivity by others for ideas and suggestions. Your concern about whether this problem lies with you indicates that you have already made attempts to be open-minded and tolerant. Certainly it can be a challenge adapting to

about my job. This employee does have some good ideas, but, frankly, I am put off by the “hotshot” attitude. Maybe I am old-fashioned or insecure?

the presence of an ambitious and assertive newcomer on your staff, but you appear to have a valid concern with the employee’s style. Meet with the EAP for a short consult to gain a clearer picture of what part of this issue lies with you and where you might start in helping this employee gain maturity in his communication. Effective communication at work is an acquired skill, and improvements come from supportive bosses we’ve met along the way.

■ My custodian is a diligent worker, but over the past couple of months, this person has mentioned to a few employees concerns about being followed by “foreign government agents” who tap the phone at work. I know the employee is distressed. Should I make a referral? How?

You should discuss this situation with your manager and a HR or other adviser. An EAP referral is appropriate, but be prepared to require a fitness for duty examination. Your employee appears to trust you enough to share these concerns, which can be helpful in convincing the person to seek support. Recommend that the individual schedule an EAP visit. Assure the employee that the EAP is the correct source of guidance. If you are not successful, arrange a fitness for duty examination in consultation with your management advisers. The EAP can also play a consultative role in this regard. Discussing beliefs that are obviously of a delusional nature are distressing to coworkers, but mental illnesses that include delusions are not uncommon. An evaluation is appropriate to rule out other risks or issues and to assist the employee in obtaining any necessary treatment.

■ My employee is very “slippery.” When I confront this person about performance issues, there is always an excuse, another angle, or some little truth in the rebuttal that causes me to back down. Either I am not assertive enough, not as smart, or too easily swayed. How do I win this game?

It isn’t necessary to outsmart your employee. Don’t focus on quality of work or technical aspects of the job yet, but the attitude demonstrated by the employee in response to confrontations or corrective interviews you conduct with the person. What you need from your employee is cooperation with your role. This means responding to your confrontations with a sincere desire to discover what is important to you and not to do battle in an effort to dodge whatever point you are trying to make. Until this mindset of your employee changes, other issues of a more practical nature will fail to be corrected. There may be some need for you to be more assertive, but it is much more likely that the missing piece here is to help your employee see that his or her perspective prompts an inappropriate response that interferes with productivity.

NOTES