

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ **My employee is not self-motivated. This person is slow to act on assignments and does not show initiative. After the employee has demonstrated this type of work style for 25 years (I call it laziness), isn't a supervisor referral to the EAP a waste of time?**

■ **My employee accepted a supervisor referral to the EAP, but withdrew the release after a few weeks. I phoned to confirm participation, but the EAP could not comment. I was told the release was no longer valid. I think the employee is being passive-aggressive. How should I react?**

■ **Obesity is not always a performance issue, but research shows that obesity still takes a serious toll on the financial well-being of work organizations. How can**

Employees with long-term performance issues often have long histories of being enabled. So the pattern results from the fact that the work style has been “reinforced” as being acceptable. This makes changes tougher, but they are still possible. You will need to make changes yourself, however, so meet with the EAP to discuss them so you do not sabotage your goal of correcting your employee’s performance. Even after 25 years, you still have a right to expect satisfactory performance, because your employee is being paid for it. It’s never too late to initiate change. Meet with your employee to discuss the performance issues. Be specific. Clearly discuss their effect on the organization and the employee’s coworkers, and be specific about what you want changed and when. Recommend the EAP as a self-referral first, but be prepared for a formal supervisory referral later.

Naturally, you are frustrated by suddenly being unable to communicate with the EAP. Your focus, however, should be on attendance or other performance issues. Employees discontinue releases for many reasons, but this should not interfere with your job. Sometimes employees withdraw releases without understanding their ultimate value. Do not focus on the issue of the withdrawn release unless there was an employment agreement of some type that stipulated that the release remain in place. Frequently, employees discontinue releases because they no longer wish to cooperate with the EAP’s recommendations. It really doesn’t matter. You still have the same administrative or disciplinary tools for addressing performance issues or attendance problems.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is a rapidly growing problem. It is garnering the same level of attention in research and the media that tobacco once received. Obesity is different because it is a disease covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. There is a greater risk that injuries suffered by obese workers will create permanent disabilities and lead to a higher number of medical treatment sessions. For this reason, it is a smart move to recommend the EAP to

supervisors support employees suffering with obesity?

obese employees following injuries, because EAP support may aid a speedier return to work. Also, myths and stereotypes heavily influence employee behavior toward obese coworkers. It is important for supervisors to intervene if and when issues of disrespect or harassment toward obese employees occur. Half of obese workers say they are discriminated against in the workplace, and their coworkers agree, saying that obesity makes it less likely that one will be respected or taken seriously. (Source: www.ncci.com and www.employmentlawalliance.com, search "obesity.")

■ What are the earliest signs that an employee may become violent some day? How can supervisors spot the most subtle clues? I have heard that depression or paranoid thoughts are common, but supervisors can't diagnose these problems. So, how do we act sooner?

The earliest signs and symptoms that an employee may someday be violent are not threats, talking about weapons, getting into fights with coworkers, fist fights, or talking about hurting someone. Although these are danger signals, more subtle and earlier symptoms may include depression, paranoid thinking, arguing with coworkers, or being belligerent with a supervisor. Supervisors can't diagnose depression or paranoia, of course, but supervisors can spot problem behaviors that are frequently associated with mental illness. Many of these indicators are not noticeable unless the supervisor talks to the employee, becomes familiar with their communication style, and can observe how they handle stress. There are subtle organizational issues that also contribute to provoking employees who may turn to violence. These issues include poor grievance procedures, poor supervisor communication, harassment by coworkers, and workplaces with high levels of stress.

■ Every good leader I've had in my past jobs, I have also liked. They operated in ways that seemed to draw people to them. Managers or leaders who want to be liked are often criticized, however. I don't think this is a bad thing, though. Am I right?

You are right, if wanting to be liked helps these managers to discover effective ways of leading others. Unfortunately, the desire to be liked is often the only goal. Some managers erroneously believe that giving others what they want is the shortest distance to acceptance and likability. Unfortunately, they quickly lose the respect of those around them. Good leaders operate with a lot of self-awareness. They possess a balanced and honest view of their own personality, and it is a correct one. Because of this awareness, they have the ability to interact with others frankly, confidently, and with a lot of empathy. This is what attracts subordinates to their leadership style. Employees feel safe in the presence of a leader who also knows how to be genuine and vulnerable. Good leaders know how to understand another person's point of view, come across with patience and empathy for that opinion, and allow others to feel valued even if they choose a different direction.

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