

Frontline Supervisor



■ **My employee does not appear to be a good fit for the position. I don't want to drag things out if we decide to dismiss this person, but should I make a referral to the EAP? I am 100% certain this is a skill and abilities issue.**

Make a referral for performance issues. If problems are strictly skills related, your employee will have the benefit of meeting with the employee assistance professional and establishing a working relationship. This could be a source of support later if an adverse action is pursued. The EAP can assess the employee's career fitness, interests, personal finances, and motivation for the current position. A discussion could lead to a job or career change, a stronger feeling of control in the face of job loss, or a reduced likelihood of a legal challenge to dismissal — or even a disturbing personal reaction to dismissal. Many supervisors are surprised to learn in similar situations that personal problems played a role in performance struggles. Think of the EAP as a “productivity improvement program” rather than just a “personal problem-solving program.” You will refer and help more employees and also achieve higher levels of productivity and a better return on your organization's investment in the EAP.

■ **Is there an “attitude” about supervision that you recommend supervisors adopt? By attitude, I mean a framework or model that reduces distress in supervision relationships and makes them more collaborative.**

Many supervisors visualize the role of supervisor as “unidirectional,” or one way. The supervisor is “directing” and the employee is acting on that direction. This is too simplistic. Employees need you as much as you need them. You have a need for job satisfaction as much as your employee does, and you have a need to achieve career goals too. This orientation to supervision will make your relationships with employees more cooperative and productive. Most supervisors want to guide employees, maximize their productivity, and help them develop and feel rewarded for the good work they do. But it is important to see yourself as teaming up with your employee. “How can we cooperate with each other?” or “What do we need to work on to achieve results together?” is a proactive orientation to supervision. Supervisors with this orientation experience more cooperation from employees, less stress, and more joy in their work.

■ **A lack of communication is a bit of a problem within my work division. I harp on people to share information more efficiently and frequently,**

When communication is problematic and the flow of information is poor, search for barriers and intervene around them. Frequently, barriers are physical or rooted in inefficient communication channels. But that is only scratching the surface. Barriers to communication in organizations can arise from attitude problems, poor supervision, personality conflicts, language differences, culture clashes, personal problems, and more. This

but invariably everyone reverts back to their old habits. These are “people issues,” so can the EAP help?

is where the EAP can provide an added dimension of help. Consult with your EAP to see if you can discover potential behavioral or human-factor-related dimensions to this problem. Many EA professionals are educated in communication dynamics and have plenty of experience in understanding the role of sender and receiver, tangible and intangible barriers, and interventions to improve communication. This may sound unconventional, but EAPs often can address problems of this type due to the perspective they offer and the unique set of operational parameters that set them apart as effective problem solvers when looking at human behavior in the workplace.

■ How can I help employees experience less stress regarding change in our organization? “Managing change” seems to be a buzzword phrase these days. Can you discuss a practical strategy to help us feel more in control over what feels uncontrollable?

Whether it’s an organization or an individual employee facing change, stress can be reduced by remaining proactive in the face of certain or unknown change rather than reacting after the fact. Experiment with the following proactive model: Meet with employees if significant change is pending. Have a frank discussion about resistance to change — how resistance is normal (but undesirable) and how it could undermine the work group. Discuss both what is feared about the change and what new opportunities or rewards are presented. Next, discuss strategy. How does your group “get ahead” of the impact and prepare to exploit the positive aspects of the change? Finally, in the face of stress, how will your group support individual members who may experience more stress from the change than others do? Consider how the EAP can serve as a facilitator for such a discussion.

■ In addition to reading about what it takes to be a good leader (or learning from my mistakes), what other strategy is particularly effective in acquiring leadership skills?

One commonly overlooked strategy of leadership development is modeling. Consider observing effective leaders within or outside of your organization. Attempt to model what they do. Nearly every manager can spot an effective leader, but being able to identify and describe what you are looking at can be a little trickier. When modeling others, seek to identify what attitudes they bring to workers and how they support the organization’s goals. What beliefs and values appear to support their effective leadership style? Where do they place priorities? What do they do that attracts others, and what causes those around them to respond positively? Perhaps most important, how do they reciprocate with others in the organization so they appear to both lead and value everyone around them?

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