

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

June 2010

*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource--Employees*

***Q.*** *My employee does not drink on the job, but I know by appearance this person is suffering from a hangover a couple of times a month. I cannot say that job performance is affected, but there must be something I can do to intervene formally. What approach should I use?*

**A.** Talk to the EAP first. Because you are having difficulty identifying performance issues associated with what appears to be a hangover, a consult is warranted. A confidential discussion with the EA professional will make it easier to develop a plan or approach that includes specific performance issues you could be overlooking. On the other hand, you may need tips on how to better spot these issues as they occur. The goal is to help you make an effective supervisor referral. Employees with hangovers do not function at optimal levels, and spotting these work-related deficiencies is therefore the key. Some of them will be obvious, but others will be more subtle. What most people don't realize is that many symptoms of hangovers create cognitive and psychomotor dysfunction as much as intoxication does, so helping your employee stop this behavior is a safety issue as much as it is a productivity concern.

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***Q.*** *Is there any new research about exercise and stress to help employees who are survivors of a layoff? Some of my employees have recently formed an exercise support group, and I am encouraged with their improved morale.*

**A.** Research associated with stress, the recession, layoffs, and their effects are continually released. In March 2010, researchers from the University of Rochester Medical Center announced their findings from a study of 2,800 employees who were survivors of layoffs. The report showed that chronic stress is strongly associated with an increase in being overweight or obese. Healthy dieting did virtually nothing to help change these conditions. Instead, the key to reducing weight—directly attributable to stress—was exercise. The results of this study strongly suggest that chronic stress, especially for sedentary workers, contributes to weight gain and that exercise is an essential part of an effective stress-reduction program. (Source: [www.urmc.rochester.edu](http://www.urmc.rochester.edu), Search: Rochester Study Connects Workplace Turmoil, Stress and Obesity, March 24, 2010)

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***Q.*** *I think social media Web sites like Facebook are consuming time and hampering the productivity of some employees. We don't have a policy against their use, but one of my employees can't stay away from these Web sites, even after I insist. Is this a real addiction?*

**A.** Although it is hotly debated, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders will not include "Internet Addiction Disorder" (IAD) in 2013 when it is next revised and published.

This has no bearing, of course, on your task of

managing the problematic use of the computer by your employee. Meet with your employee, and with your documentation in hand, make a supervisor referral to the EAP. Even though IAD is not officially a mental disorder, that does not mean that it is not treatable with help from the EAP, support, follow-up, and a program of recovery to help maintain abstinence from compulsive Internet use.

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***Q. When being confronted on a specific matter, my employee glared saying, “You know, I am really about to get into someone’s face!” The employee stormed off. This employee often has a hostile tone, but my supervisor and I debated whether this was a threat. What do you think?***

***A.*** There is an old saying that goes, “The meaning of your communication is the response that you get.” In this instance, at least one of you perceived this statement as a threat. Most employees know that they can’t openly make threats at work. So what you may be witnessing is belligerence cloaked with an offhand, cryptic expression. You got the message this employee intended to send. You do not need to split hairs and debate what was meant, or the precise meaning of his or her statement. Feeling threatened is enough to confront and correct this behavior. Your employee may have issues with boundaries, anger management, self-control, and respect. Behavior of this sort tends to get worse and is reinforced by those who experience it, minimize its meaning, and then do not take steps to address it.

***Q. We have a very diverse workplace, and I sometimes correct employees when I see them demonstrating poor tolerance of coworkers’ differences. I am not an expert on tolerance and bias, so can you offer***

***some language, tips, or “phrases” helpful in educating employees?***

***A.*** Education does help alter bias, but the bottom line is that employee behavior must conform to what is civil and supportive of your organization’s work goals. Let employees know that the goal of tolerance is a respectful workplace and that without it, the interests of the work organization are not served. When correcting employee behavior in the context of supervisory meetings, your goal should be to educate, not counsel or investigate the psychological influences of employee bias.

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