

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

November 2010

***Q.** I have never tried to hide the fact that I am a perfectionist. I obsess over trying to do things right. Yes, I know there is no such thing as perfection. However, if I see a mistake right in front of me, I can't just walk away from it. How does this affect employees?*

A. One of the hidden hazards of perfectionism is the tucking away of and attempts to avoid many things that make you feel less than perfect. As a result, you may rob yourself of having fun and feeling happier. This could include avoidance of sharing your true feelings with others, avoidance of feeling vulnerable, avoidance of behaving in an authentic way in social settings, not trying new things, being overly concerned about what you imagine as others' overly critical view of you, and allowing these things to affect how well you get to know your employees. Perfectionism is not incurable. Talk to the EAP about your work style. Your perfectionism has likely brought about many successes in your career. You won't lose these skills and abilities by giving up perfectionism. Instead they will become less important in defining who you are.

***Q.** After an industrial accident, employees were offered help from the EAP. Some declined, and one of them is often AWOL on Fridays and also on Mondays. I think the employee is drinking. The employee leaves messages about doctor's orders and excuses.*

A. You should follow your organization's work rules and policies to address the employee's absenteeism. During the course of your constructive confrontation or letter writing, be sure to make a supervisor referral to the EAP. The EAP will sort out the issues and whether any post-trauma response, alcohol use, or other problems are associated with the absenteeism. Be careful not to discuss this matter with coworkers or managers at your level who do not have a need to know. No matter what the situation appears to look like on the surface, another problem or issue could explain it. The reason for your employee's absences could be completely unrelated to any of the issues you have described. The need for answers, however, can prompt you to say or do things that are unhelpful or violate the employee's privacy. Stay focused on attendance and accountability.

***Q.** What is the most important signal a supervisor will get that a new employee is likely to be a valuable performer in the future of the organization?*

A. Although intelligence, skills, and abilities all play key roles in an employee's success, the one most outstanding ability that reinforces all others is effective workplace communication. Effective workplace communication is an ongoing problem in most work organizations. There is no end to managing communication and improving upon communication systems. Human relations in business and productivity at every level depend on effective communication. Consider the information,

ideas, thoughts, opinions, and plans organizations must transmit daily to drive productivity. And consider the importance or role of communication in conflicts, morale, creativity, feedback, and motivation. Without communication, nothing moves. Since many employees, and people in general, struggle with communication roadblocks that range from avoiding communication to denial of the need for it, an employee who can intuitively judge how much information you need, and when and how often you need it, is a real find.

Q. If I send an employee to the EAP, and the employee does well, will I see an immediate return to the proper level of performance? Will the EAP tie my hands by implying or directly stating that I need to be patient with substandard performance?

A. As a manager, you must decide what constitutes satisfactory performance and whether you can accommodate below standard performance, if it is demonstrated or requested by your employee. The EAP will not direct that you accept below standard performance following the referral of your employee. Any such request would come from the employee directly. With a release, the EAP may convey what health care or treatment professionals have requested as accommodations to assist your employee in treatment or recovery. If necessary, you should consult with HR or your management advisor and determine the acceptability of performance modifications sought by your employee. If you put the needs of your work unit second to your employee's requests for job modifications, and the work unit or organization suffers as a result, it could sour your view of the role of the EAP. This is one reason the EAP remains neutral in your decision with regard to accommodations.

Q. I have an employee who is very manipulative. This person acts like a victim when things go wrong, causes triangles to form between employees which creates conflicts, pretends I walk on water, but talks behind my back, and more. I can't imagine this person changing. Is it possible?

A. These behaviors may be well-practiced and dysfunctional, but each of them is a style of coping or a learned behavior that has a healthy alternative. These new behaviors can be learned, but a motivated employee who is willing to do the hard work is key. A supervisor referral makes this possible. It can be difficult for a supervisor to document manipulative behaviors because the effects of these behaviors on others may appear to be more subjective or not easily defined concretely. This is where your EAP can help. Work closely with your employee assistance professional and pin down your approach, so you identify and measure the behaviors most likely to be documentable and easily explained in a constructive confrontation. Your employee can change, and almost always the proof of this is the cessation of inappropriate behaviors for short periods of time that you have likely seen following your past confrontations.

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