

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR



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

*September 2012*

***Q.*** *As a supervisor, how can I help my employees use emotional intelligence to do a better job at managing our customers? Is it too technical a concept to discuss and over the head of someone like me who is not clinical or the recipient of an advanced degree?*

**A.** Emotional intelligence (EI) is not too difficult to discuss with your employees. Use a brief definition of EI as being the ability to recognize, describe, understand, manage, influence, and utilize emotions effectively in human relationships. The following EI ideas can help your employees be more effective and experience less stress with regard to customers: 1) Pay attention to customers' emotions and how they change or shift so that the needs of the customer are more precisely met. 2) Use empathy with customers. 3) Use emotions in communications (e.g., "Are you happy with your selection?" versus "Did you find everything you were looking for?"). 4) Anticipate customers' concerns and inquire about them before they are stated. 5) Pay attention to body language that can give signals as to needs or desires. There are many more ideas about how to use EI at work, but these examples will help generate deeper customer loyalty.

***Q.*** *I always thought that domestic violence was almost exclusively a behind-closed-doors phenomenon and that the workplace*

*was simply not in the picture. Is domestic violence something employers really need to be concerned with as a business matter?*

**A.** Business and industry are severely affected by domestic violence because of lost productivity, health care costs, absenteeism, turnover, negative effects on workers, and direct risks to the workplace when violence comes through the door. The health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide by intimate partners exceeds approximately \$6 billion each year. The annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence is estimated at \$727.8 million, with more than 7.9 million paid workdays lost per year. This vast problem led to the formation in 1995 of the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence. Its purpose is to make a difference, and in recent years it has even expanded to help educate young people to support zero tolerance for dating violence in an effort to curb problems with future employees.

***Q.*** *It's frequently hard for me to delegate and let go. How can I become more adept at trusting my employees with assignments and not be so controlling or hover over them?*

**A.** Not letting go and exerting control create more anxiety for you than does allowing those you supervise to manage their work. Your first step toward change is to understand that controlling behavior feels like domination and is disrespectful to your

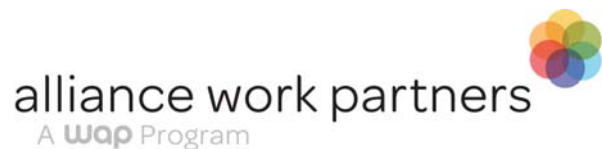
employees. It does not feel helpful and supportive. Some people learn early in life to act controlling because they have modeled it after others who played significant roles in their lives. Others learn controlling behaviors by being forced to rely on themselves in order meet basic needs or feel safe in unsafe environments. There are many reasons a person exerts overly controlling behaviors, but work with your EAP. It can help you implement a simple plan for letting go that will help you meet your goal, find more balance, and be happier in your job.

***Q. Our employees are very tolerant of one another's differences. I am proud of that because we feel like family and are supportive of each other. Is this the ultimate value of diversity awareness, having people feel accepted and valued?***

**A.** Truly valuing diversity goes much further than tolerating someone else who is different so they feel accepted. The world of work is becoming increasingly global and interdependent. This has made it imperative for business organizations to understand and promote acceptance of diverse workforces so they can compete. Most employees don't realize there is also a strong business case for valuing diversity, but they should understand it so it reinforces respectful behavior. Not valuing diversity will create a negative consumer image, with loss of preference, revenue, and even advertisers that won't support a company disrespectful of diversity. A valued and diverse workforce has employees who feel accepted and more positive about their jobs. This in turn leads to lower turnover, a cost organizations seek to avoid.

***Q. I want to push my employees to do their best, but I don't want to be accused of bullying. How can I help employees maximize their productivity but not have them see me as aggressive, especially as a bully?***

**A.** The most common behaviors perpetrated by bullies in the workplace can also be accidentally attributed to well-meaning supervisors, who without malice may use supervisory work practices that produce ill effects for their employees. A few examples include: 1) having their opinions and views ignored, 2) having information withheld that affects their performance, 3) being allotted an unmanageable workload, 4) being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines, and 5) being ordered to do work below competence. The importance of good communication is crucial because you cannot know how employees perceive your drive to maintain high levels of productivity. Where your goal is simply to get work done under pressure, employees may view your treatment of them as hostile. Take responsibility as a supervisor by having a proactive, two-way communication process that allows you to get feedback as to whether or not your style is problematic for those you supervise.



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