



The Frontline Supervisor

February 2024

Q. I'm excited about my new role as supervisor. I'd like some valuable and practical tips to enhance my career growth and build a positive reputation. What suggestions can you offer?

A. Here are some practical tips: 1) Know where your job fits into the purpose of the organization. This will enhance your motivation and commitment, and your personal goals will align with those of the organization. 2) Invest your energy in activities your supervisor considers valuable. 3) Ask questions; never be thinking, "I am not sure what the organization wants me to do." 4) Develop an instinct for knowing when to communicate to get answers, clarify issues, and double-check what's expected of you. 5) Share credit with others. When mistakes happen, own them without spreading blame. 6) Learn to finesse how to inform upper management about successes by highlighting positive outcomes, impact, and measurable results of your work. 7) Be sensitive to workplace politics. They are a reality of human interaction. 8) Develop reliable stress management strategies that work for you. 9) Learn the art of staying calm when others are emotional during a crisis. 10) Build a network of individuals who can offer support, share insights, and add to your continuous development.

Q. I am making a formal referral of my employee to the EAP, but I don't think the counselor can be of much help. This employee has been under my supervision for over ten years. The issues with him remain disorganization and not caring about satisfactory performance. How can the EAP help?

A. Given the length of time you have known your employee, have a consult with the EAP and examine the history of his performance issues and how they have been managed. Do this prior to referral. Discuss issues in correcting his performance and patterns of behavior, and how you have responded to his conduct issues or failure to perform the job satisfactorily. Helping employees resolve long-term performance issues is sometimes best accomplished through this discovery process in a meeting with the supervisor so important insights can be gathered by the EAP prior to an assessment. Your employee may have problems that remain hidden and must be addressed, but improving performance may also require the EAP offering guidance to you on improving your supervision.

Q. My employee is involved in a divorce, and it has been very disruptive to his performance. There are legal and parental issues. I have suggested the EAP, but he hasn't reached out yet. How can the EAP help? Perhaps I can share this information to motivate him to participate.

A. Here's what you might want to share: 1) Emotional support: Taking advantage of the fact that the EAP is a safe and confidential space to express feelings and emotions related to the divorce. 2) Coping strategies: Learning effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and turmoil. 3) Time management: Organizing time to balance work responsibilities and personal needs during this challenging period, which includes learning how not to get overwhelmed. 4) Communication skills: Improving communication skills to help navigate difficult conversations, both at work and in personal relationships, including knowing how important it is to communicate with you and maintain transparency about the situation without oversharing. 5) Conflict resolution: Receiving guidance on resolving conflicts at the office or in personal relationships. 6) Self-care practices: Exploring activities to promote physical and mental well-being to counterbalance the stress of the divorce. 7) Goal setting: Helping the employee maintain a sense of direction and purpose. 8) Referrals: Directing to additional resources or support services, such as legal assistance, financial counseling, or support groups.

Q. I'm reluctant to utilize the EAP for supervisory consultation because I'm concerned that it could be perceived as a reflection on my skills and abilities, despite reassurances from management that it won't have a negative impact. How can I feel more comfortable?

A. Feeling reluctant to use the EAP for supervisory consultation is not unusual. Realize, however, that consultative help may be the key to resolving a serious behavioral issue with a high-risk employee someday. Keep in mind that EAP consultations are confidential and that they can be conducted over the phone. View seeking EAP assistance as a proactive step for personal and professional growth. It demonstrates a commitment to improvement and learning. If you still feel uneasy, have an open conversation with your supervisor about their thoughts concerning an EAP consultation. Realize that your company culture and values are in line with helping employees and preserving human resources, as demonstrated by their investment in an EAP.

Q. I understand how supervisors should focus on performance and not attempt to diagnose employees. I do think it is natural to consider and figure out what's causing problems with an employee. So how are supervisors supposed to overcome this tendency?

A. It is natural for supervisors to consider what personal problems might be contributing to an employee's performance issues. This much is true. The real problem is what often follows: giving consideration, time, discussion, attention, or even inappropriate accommodations to help the employee, even while the unsatisfactory performance continues. Historically, this has occurred within companies that did not have an EAP. The caution against directly diagnosing employees is tied to the potential consequences of allowing an employee to persist in their illness, encountering ongoing challenges, and making unfulfillable promises regarding treatment or seeking assistance. The recommended alternative involves referring the employee to the EAP, minimizing the risk of losing the worker and mitigating the various costs associated with retaining a troubled employee on the payroll.

Questions? Call during business hours 815.748.8334, or after hours at 800.373.3327