



# The Frontline Supervisor

June 2019

**Q.** Everyone seems to know that money is not the best long-term motivator of employee productivity in the workplace. What is?

**A.** It is usually the case that factors reinforce each other or compound their influence to motivate workers. In other words, no single motivational factor alone is likely to work in isolation very long. Research consistently points to having a good manager, feeling like one is making a difference, doing something good for others, and personal growth opportunities as strong influencers, but the factor that is consistently highest is peer motivation or influence. Having a positive workplace with opportunities that incorporate peer influence in shaping motivation can yield good results in maximizing performance. But be cautious; allowing this motivational factor to become part of your work culture without considering all the other important factors that influence motivation will yield poor returns.

**Q.** My employee is late to work quite often, but I am helping him with ideas and suggestions, hoping to put an end to this practice. I know that lateness can be caused by personal problems, so how long should I offer this help before making a referral to the EAP?

**A.** Make a referral to the EAP now. Presumably you had urged your employee to come to work on time before you started offering tips. So, it is time for your employee to use the available resources. You can still offer tips for getting to work on time, and there is nothing wrong with doing so. However, recommending the EAP now and then making a formal referral later if needed is the fastest route to resolving this problem. Chronic attendance problems are often associated with lack of enthusiasm, not severe personal problems. And it is the EAP that can most quickly identify either of these issues.

**Q.** I am a new supervisor for the first time ever. I am not well-versed in the subject of “supervisory skills.” Can you recommend important tips I should follow? I do not have time to read a bunch of books.

**A.** Here are a few tips to get you started, but they are not a substitute for more education. Be sure you know what your job entails and the performance expectations your manager and her/his manager have for you. Ask for a week to shadow a seasoned supervisor who is in good standing with your organization. This will allow you to model priorities, communication, and leadership style. Think about who can mentor you later when the going gets tough. Take time now to read company policies, the handbook, and the performance review system so later you are not caught off guard by violations, either employees’ or your own. Use the Employee Assistance Program when conflicts arise and you need a listening ear or input. Your relationship with the EAP will also be confidential, like it is for any employee. Know who and where the experts in your organization are located, and create an easily accessible list of these individuals.

**Q.** Can the EAP work with an employee who is having trouble as a proper “work culture fit” in our organization? Although hired with great expectations, things aren’t working out so well. We believe this employee will eventually leave because of not being in tune with our workplace values and style of work.

**A.** Employers are often concerned about work culture fit in hiring. There is a good rationale for desiring employees whose temperament complements that of the organization. However, when cultural fit does not appear after hire, working with the EAP may help discover whether issues of concern are symptoms of treatable conditions resolvable with counseling or coaching. Culture fit in many organizations is not well defined, and it can be a reason for loss of valuable talent. Many job interviews help identify employees who are adaptable, articulate, and able to persevere or show high energy, confidence, and passion for the products or services offered by the organization. If evidence of these attributes diminishes later, could an underlying problem exist that the EAP can help resolve? An assessment is the way to find out. Turnover is costly and disruptive, so it is a smart move to discuss your employee’s performance issues and hope for an equitable solution that prevents loss of the worker.

**Q.** Why is it important for supervisors to understand “psychological safety” in the workplace? Is this just a passing fad? Isn’t it a new burden for supervisors and a way of taking too much care of employees when it comes to their happiness and well-being?

**A.** A psychologically safe workplace is another way to describe a work climate that encourages employees to be vulnerable and authentic, present their talents and abilities, and do so without fear of disapproval from managers or peers. There is a business case for psychological safety in the workplace as a tool that produces a positive influence on the bottom line. From a supervisory perspective, one key practice in promoting a psychologically safe workplace is to continually notice what appears to inhibit employees from sharing their ideas, notions, and concepts for improvement and change regarding products, services, and systems. This could be almost any tangible or intangible obstacle, from physical barriers in an office to employee meetings and coworker behaviors that discourage creative expression. It can also be your own lack of modeling risk-taking behaviors or failure to make psychological safety a tradition in your work unit that is continually reinforced by what you say and do.

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