



The Frontline Supervisor

July 2024

Q. I read how passionate employees are more enthusiastic and tireless in the pursuit of goals. Is there a way to help employees become passionate about the work they are doing, and can the EAP play a role in assisting me to make it happen?

A. You can help employees be more passionate about their work by increasing their understanding of the big “why, what, and how”: Why am I doing this job? What’s its importance? How do my tasks contribute to the big picture? Start by sharing the company vision and goals. Go beyond the new employee orientation. Focus on how each employee’s work directly fits within the big picture. Doing so ensures employees understand how work flows throughout the organization and how their contribution impacts other departments and the final product. Give thought to these issues before presenting them to employees. A powerful maneuver is to let your employees participate in key meetings where they can see these internal customers. Finding other ways for employees to engage with other departments can also be rewarding. These steps bring strong context to what they do. Brainstorming ideas with the EAP can reveal to you their empathy and organizational knowledge, helping you find new ways to inspire your employees. Additionally, celebrating employees’ milestones highlights these connections and emphasizes the importance of their contributions.

Q. As the new head of a work unit, I’m concerned about gaining acceptance. I understand that people will scrutinize me for a while. However, are there specific actions that more severely damage a manager’s credibility? Can the EAP guide me?

A. New managers anxious for management’s approval and being recognized as admired leaders may forget that having happy, productive employees is key to your goal. Consider how the following behaviors can damage newly forming relationships, making them difficult to form 1) micromanaging; 2) staying hidden behind closed doors; 3) building personal relationships with one or two workers while ignoring the rest of the group; 4) failing to communicate transparently enough so employees aren’t wondering what’s going on; 5) showing favoritism when delegating assignments; 6) ignoring team input; 7) appearing disinterested in employees personally (e.g., being “all business”); 8) making promises to the work group that you do not keep or that management will not approve (employees will likely be angry with you, not management, for the disapproval). Seek support from the EAP to reduce worry and anxiety in a new supervisory position. You will be less likely to engage in these missteps.

Q. How do supervisors inadvertently take credit for their employees' work, and what must supervisors be careful to avoid so this does not happen?

A. Employees periodically complain about supervisors taking credit for their work. However, these incidents are often more complex than they seem. Supervisors must be careful that these misunderstandings do not create resentment and undermine team morale. How it happens: 1) Supervisors may proudly present work, a project, or an idea to higher management or in meetings without acknowledging the contribution of the author or team of workers. 2) When discussing team accomplishments, a supervisor may use "I" instead of "we." 3) If a supervisor is summarizing a team's accomplishments, not mentioning employees by name who made significant contributions can lead to the perception that the supervisor "orchestrated" the success, thereby taking undue credit. 4) Management may give a supervisor a task that is then properly delegated. However, a report back to management may not mention the employees who contributed. Tip: Communicate to management an employee's contributions. Look for opportunities to praise publicly. It will not take away from the positive view of your leadership and, instead, will enhance it.

Q. Can you offer a few ways I can increase morale that don't cost a cent, perhaps some I have probably never heard of before?

A. High employee morale results from many factors working together in harmony, but a manager's role is key. Are you approachable and supportive? Do you lead by example? If so, these few tips will complement your leadership style to help elevate morale. 1) Praise employees "behind their backs," not just in front of them. There's nothing like hearing from a third party how highly management thinks of you. 2) Comment more on what employees are doing right and well. Don't wait for problems to arise. 3) Regularly and positively acknowledge and celebrate successes. 4) Seek input from quieter, more reserved employees to see if they can provide valuable insights for the project or task you're working on. Recognition and validation of their ideas can significantly improve their morale and job satisfaction. 5) If permissible and appropriate, give a hardworking employee a couple of hours off and allow them to leave early. Can you think of more? Try this resource: "1501 Ways to Reward Employees" by Bob Nelson.

Q. It's a habit, I admit it. I speak with sarcasm a lot, but when does sarcasm become bullying? I guess old habits die hard, but would this be something the EAP could help me overcome?

A. One definition of sarcasm is using words that mean the opposite of what you really want to say, especially in order to show irritation. For example, using the phrase "Great job, genius" when an employee makes a mistake is an example of sarcasm, and most workers would resent it. There are more subtle examples, but your position of authority as a supervisor naturally produces strong leverage for making sarcasm a hazardous form of communication with those you supervise. The EAP can help you recognize the situations and emotions that trigger your sarcastic responses. Understanding these triggers is the first step toward changing your behavior. Another part of this intervention is helping you reflect on how sarcasm affects others, increasing your awareness of the negative impact. One other suggestion would be to work with the EAP to help facilitate your ability to empathize with others. This may reduce your tendency to use sarcasm as a means of humor.

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