



# The Frontline Supervisor

October 2019

**Q.** I think I am a good role model for my employees because I am dedicated to the company, a good listener, a team-builder, and a problem solver. Does this cover the bases or is there more to being a good role model? Is there a checklist for self-evaluation?

**A.** Being a role model is leading by example. If you adopt this view of your role, it encompasses nearly everything employees can see you do or hear you say. There's no perfection or checklist. Employees reflect on nearly everything you do, and all the implications for them. This is a natural process. If you don't take vacations, employees will be self-conscious taking vacations. Some may even model this behavior. If you come in late, employees notice it. Some may feel more freedom to come in late, too, or not worry so much about it. This dynamic can be applied to hundreds of matters. Regarding your role in leading by example, most behaviors fall under these headings:

- 1) How you prioritize your work and where you put your focus
- 2) your attitude and demeanor, and communication style
- 3) taking care of yourself, work-life balance, dress, exercise, use of leave, and work hours
- 4) dedication to the employer and loyalty to the organization
- 5) How you treat and interact with others, vulnerability and openness, and how you show appreciation.

**Q.** My employee works overtime almost every day. This is an outstanding worker with high productivity. However, I think help from the EAP is needed because the work effort is too obsessive. This isn't your typical employee with personal problems and poor performance. It's the opposite. How do I proceed?

**A.** It's indisputable that employees who work too much are not performing at their best, nor in the best interest of the organization. Although their productivity may be high, their well-being is in jeopardy, and this does not bode well for the organization's most valuable resource, which is employees. For the same reason, one would not abuse a piece of machinery to get more productivity out of it, thereby shortening its lifespan and potential. Your employee's performance is not outstanding in the true sense of this term, so do not label it as such. Instead, define what you mean by appropriate work on the job and how an employee can earn the top rating. Then expect it. Overworked employees cost too much in burnout, teamwork deterioration, and decline in effective relationships on the job. Something has to fall short, and it is likely found among these factors. Counsel your employee to make the changes, and refer the employee to the EAP based on his or her inability to follow through. There is something going on that explains the overwork. The EAP will discover what it is, and help the employee resolve it.

**Q.** I encouraged my employee to visit the EAP, strictly as a self-referral because of job problems and some personal problems. Can I ask him or her to sign a release so I can hear back from the EA professional to confirm things are getting “handled properly”?

**A.** If you have concerns about your employee’s performance and must have communication to feel assured about follow through in obtaining some sort of help, don’t push for a “self-referral” and a signed release. Instead, make a formal referral. The benefit of a formal referral is it helps you manage a troubled worker in his or her performance improvement. Some supervisors are hesitant about making formal referrals. They mistakenly believe that a formal referral to the EAP is categorically serious or punitive, or will create a record to negatively impact the employee’s job situation. EAP policies preclude these possibilities. An EAP formal referral is not disciplinary action and creates no special personnel record by itself, and its confidentiality provisions are no different than a self-referral.

**Q.** The wife of one of my employees phoned to say he was threatening suicide in an argument over the weekend. But looking at him now, he appears perfectly fine to me. This sounds like a domestic dispute, and not my business. It also appears the crisis has passed. Should I refer her to the EAP and forget it?

**A.** Recommend the EAP to the spouse, but inform your boss or HR advisor about the call. Together decide how to proceed with regard to discussing the matter with your employee. This sort of phone call is rare, but it’s serious. Many employers have received similar phone calls from family members reporting domestic incidents. Be calm, but proceed as if the report is true. In other words, you’re responding responsibly out of an abundance of caution, because domestic disputes that become violent can spill into the workplace, placing employees at risk. Call the EAP and consult on this matter. Always team with your boss and advisors to determine next steps with incidents of this nature. Don’t go it alone.

**Q.** Every supervisor wants to know more about how to excite employees and show appreciation without having to rely on a budget to do it. What are some of the most overlooked ways of showing appreciation, beyond saying “thank you”?

**A.** There are many resources and dozens of books on how to show appreciation to employees without financial support to do it. Saying “thank you” periodically is one way, but nothing beats a handwritten note for doing so. The three parts to the ideal thank-you are

- 1) writing the words “thank you” in the first sentence (e.g., Susan, I want to thank you for...)
- 2) saying you appreciate the action/work/effort and why
- 3) explaining the positive impact of the employee’s action on the organization. Of course, no technique should be overused, because its impact will lessen with repetition. However in this digital age of texting and emailing, the psychological impact of a written thank-you from a boss is important. Few employees will not retain it or will fail to tell others.

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