



# The Frontline Supervisor

November 2022

**Q. Can the EAP help me stop worrying about whether others are judging me as a new supervisor? I don't want to go through a big therapy process. I just want to stop being so self-conscious so I can engage with my peers, be more relaxed, and stop worrying about whether others are judging me.**

A. Discuss your goals with the EAP. The program can help you by giving you a plan to practice, monitor, and gauge progress in overcoming these habits of thinking so you feel more confident. Your struggle is a common one many people are hesitant to admit, but you can learn social and engagement skills that will help. You will discover positive self-talk affirmations, how to avoid becoming preoccupied with these thoughts, how to focus on others rather than yourself, and how to overcome false beliefs about what people are thinking in social settings. You will learn to stop thinking about making an impression and instead concentrate on engaging effectively. After an assessment, or later on, you might become interested in exploring other challenges related to your immediate goals. If so, the EAP can offer ideas or other sources of assistance.

**Q. How can I be less stressed out as a supervisor? Yes, I know about work-life balance, finding a mentor, and even relaxation exercises, but there must be more generally helpful ways to cope. Perhaps other supervisors who are less stressed than I am have some tips they can share? How can the EAP help?**

A. Unfortunately, many supervisors are stressed, and it might be getting worse. A Gallup survey last year found that 35% of supervisors report being extremely stressed out. Being stressed and experiencing burnout grew after 2020 and was worse in 2021. With the EAP's help, examine your stress more closely. Often, stress management requires a closer look at a person's unique circumstances. For example, you know you are overworked, but is being bullied on the job making it worse? You are overworked, but is feeling you don't measure up to the job making it worse? You are waking at night with work worries on your mind, but is drinking heavily before bed a contributing factor to sleep disturbance? A discussion with the EAP can help you see the bigger picture so that you can employ proper strategies that are more likely to be effective. Later, the EAP can help monitor your progress.

Source: [www.gallup.com/workplace/357404/manager-burnout-getting-worse.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/workplace/357404/manager-burnout-getting-worse.aspx)

**Q. Did the COVID-19 pandemic influence the way workplaces run besides the remote and hybrid models we have seen emerge? Specifically, I am talking about the supervisor-employee relationship, communication, and supervision models?**

A. One study examined the impact of the pandemic on employee and supervisor relationships. In June 2022, a survey group found that employees are more desirous of, and more productive with, a boss who is empathic, authentic, emotionally available, and willing to be flexible in responding to the needs of workers. Forbes has also written about this topic, labeling it “human leadership.” Has the pandemic contributed to a desire for employees to experience this type of leadership, or has it always been present? That question isn’t answered. Today’s employees might be more responsive to authority figures who are less aloof. We know supervisors play significant roles in facilitating employee engagement and that engaged employees are more productive—research shows them to be up to 27% more productive. Whether supervisors can learn to be more “humanistic” in their supervision style may be discovered in the future. Right now, only 29% of employees report having a humanistic supervisor. Source: [www.gartner.com](http://www.gartner.com) [search “identifies human leadership evolution”]

**Q. My employee is an outstanding performer and until recently was my best salesperson. Sales performance has lagged, however. Is it appropriate to refer this worker to the EAP for the sole purpose of increasing sales? No personal or emotional issues are apparent.**

A. For decades, the accepted practice was to base supervisor referrals to EAPs on employee job performance issues. The most valuable metric of your employee’s performance appears to be sales units. If so, any reasonable attempt to help improve sales performance is justifiable. Can the EAP help? It depends on what factors influence the ability to close more sales. There could be a personal issue requiring some help or intervention. It may be something beyond the scope of your ability as a supervisor to influence. The EAP may be the best resource for help because some issue beyond sales management skills could be influencing the decline in performance. Your problem with this worker illustrates another important convention in EAP programming—don’t diagnose (or rule out) the cause of performance issues you can’t correct. In this case, it would be tempting for some managers to assume the EAP is not an appropriate source of help.

**Q. I am now supervising remote staff. I can see how communication, trust, and engagement (trying to ensure remote employees are happy and delivering their best) will be challenging. What are the supervision challenges that will delay my referral of a problem employee to the EAP?**

A. Communication is the key issue that affects remote workers and your relationship with them. The other two concerns you cite—trust and engagement—have mostly to do with the effectiveness of your communication strategy. It is crucial to create communication protocols and systems so those you supervise do not feel left out or unsure of what you want them to do and are working with recognition, value, and parity with office employees despite being off-site. Any deficits in these three areas likely would result in cynicism, coworker conflicts, loss of engagement, and diminished loyalty and turnover. Employees may compensate for their feelings of disconnection by reducing productivity or splitting their work time between work and personal needs. Some of your employees may have productivity issues even under the best workplace conditions. The degree to which you measure the quality or quantity of work assigned to their essential functions will determine the ease of being able to refer them to the EAP if they need assistance of some type.

