



# The Frontline Supervisor

November 2023

**Q. What can a supervisor do if employees are demonstrating anxiety and have too much discussion about war news and terrorism? I am growing concerned that it might interfere with productivity, but I can't just tell everyone to stop wasting time on world news. There needs to be a balance.**

A. Productivity is paramount, but you're right: telling everyone to get back to work would be counterproductive. Still, boundaries are important. The organization's needs can't be subordinate to the news. Acknowledge the concern and be supportive. Ensure employees know that the EAP can help them with anxiety. Remind them of boundaries by encouraging discussions during breaks or after hours. It's timely to offer stress reduction skills training as a wellness activity, as well as team-building exercises. See how the EAP can help. Almost universally, people experiencing anxiety and worry do better when they have a routine, so simply encourage employees to maintain their daily routines. Even with these suggestions, however, keep an eye on productivity. Don't micromanage but focus on outcomes and results. Lastly, your behavior, as always, sets the tone, so demonstrate a calm and composed demeanor. You will be surprised how quickly it is adopted by staff.

**Q. My employee is smart, learns quickly, and has many accomplishments. He is not very assertive, however. Consequently, he doesn't stand out, and I think it has hurt his promotion chances. He has great performance, but I want him to be more assertive. I know the EAP can help, but what should be my approach?**

A. A self-referral encouraged by you would likely help the employee, but if the most effective means of maximizing your employee's potential to the benefit of the organization is to have him be more assertive, then a stronger insistence on considering help would arguably be appropriate. Many supervisors mistakenly link a formal referral to the EAP with employee troubles, resistance, and the potential for dismissal or other adverse action, but this is not true. A formal referral can be a positive and exciting step for the employee and the organization. In this instance, the EAP would help the employee practice clear and concise communication in meetings and presentations to help him articulate his ideas and contributions more effectively. As a complement, the EAP would help the employee also ask for feedback from peers and superiors on his performance. These two steps alone could provide valuable insights for improvement and demonstrate a commitment to personal growth, making him a more ideal candidate for promotion.

**Q. What problems can supervisors anticipate if they ignore or don't confront disrespectful behavior in the workplace?**

A. When employees witness a supervisor ignoring serious conduct issues with a coworker, it can have several significant consequences that affect the workplace. Employees may lose trust in the supervisor's ability to enforce workplace standards and maintain a safe and productive environment, which can lead to decreased confidence in leadership overall. Growing discontent can then lead to less engagement, decreased motivation, and diminished commitment to the employer's mission. If employees become preoccupied with the problematic behavior, it can hinder their focus on performance. Also, negative conduct can be contagious, creating more frequent conflicts and even the possibility of workplace violence. Generally, when problems remain unresolved, ripple effects and unpredictable consequences follow. The costliest problem typically is turnover, as employees tire of conflict and tension and leave to find a happier workplace.

**Q. What does it mean for a manager or management team to lead with empathy?**

A. Leading with empathy means that the supervisor puts a priority on recognizing, understanding, and addressing the emotions, needs, and perspectives of their employees. They create a positive and supportive workplace where employees feel valued and understood. This leads to higher morale and a more engaged workforce. And that translates into lots of other great things, like lower turnover, higher productivity, fewer disciplinary matters, and a happier place to work. To be an empathetic supervisor, take the time to understand how employees feel, whether it's related to work challenges, personal issues, or successes. Empathetic supervisors are also good listeners and feedback givers. And importantly, empathetic leaders involve employees in decision-making processes, valuing their input and diverse perspectives. Learn more from "Leading the Empathic Agile Enterprise" (2021) by Dr. Gail Ferreira.

**Q. Conflict resolution is a crucial skill for supervisors. Can you offer a checklist of steps?**

A. Hundreds of resources exist to help you acquire conflict resolution skills. Here's a checklist: 1) Recognize that a conflict exists. 2) Gather information separately from parties to the conflict. 3) Determine what you believe is the root cause of the conflict. 4) Stay neutral. Don't take a side. 5) As the supervisor, plainly describe the goal to the employees in conflict: finding a mutually satisfying solution (while fixing or improving the relationship between the employees). 6) Create a respectful place for the involved parties to express themselves without fear of judgment. 7) Explore a way to find common ground. 8) Brainstorm solutions. 9) Evaluate and select solutions. 10) Agree to a timeline for implementing the solution, including steps, dates, and who does what. 11) Agree on a follow-up and feedback plan to keep the ball rolling. 12) Monitor the solution and team together as needed to modify the final agreement.

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