

Supervisor FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



I've been a supervisor 20 years and have heard the same complaints from employees about bosses over the years. What are the most common complaints? Perhaps knowing what they are would help supervisors prevent these problems sooner.



I'm an energetic person, and I have a positive personality, but I can't say it rubs off on employees. Other than staying enthusiastic and sincere, how can I inspire employees to maximize their performance?



When I recently referred my employee to the EAP, the response was a complaint that I wasn't "being fair." It sounded pretty odd,

Answers



Complaints about supervisors sometimes fall short on credibility, but the more common ones include the following: "My boss has favorite employees, and they get the best assignments or are excused from undesirable assignments." "My boss doesn't seem to care about my problems." "My boss hasn't evaluated my performance in years and I don't know where I stand." "My boss has personality issues and experiences conflict with me and other employees." "My boss often avoids me, doesn't say hello, or doesn't acknowledge me." "My boss doesn't trust me with key assignments." And so on. When you conduct performance reviews, listen carefully. Inquire about how your employees feel about their job and their relationship with you. You'll quickly spot trouble points if you keep the above complaints in mind. The EAP can help. It may be difficult to admit when some of these issues apply, but changes will produce big payoffs.



Assume that each of your employees is capable of magnificent achievements. This will positively affect your attitude and interactions with them. Your current style of leadership is setting an example, but good communication is also crucial. Let everyone know what's going on within the organization and the importance of their role in the big picture. Cite successes, trends, and opportunities. Be realistic, but let employees know what awaits them personally, and as a team, for achieving goals. Check your behavior. Mistrust, inability to adapt to change, disrespect toward employees, or a perception that you aren't performing at your peak can be magnified by employees and provides fodder for chatter. This will undermine your goal of keeping employees engaged. Process your stress with other supervisors and the EAP, and develop ideas for nurturing your staff. This will reduce isolation and keep you energized.



The reaction you received is caused by a common, yet preventable, misunderstanding. Just as you would support employees taking advantage of any organizational resource, initiate discussions with them around the role of the EAP and the special support opportunity it affords employees. A natural tendency exists for employees to view

Frontline Supervisor

Questions

since the EAP is a positive thing. The formal referral seemingly was viewed by the employee as some sort of punishment. What explains this reaction?



I've an employee who's shy and refuses requests to speak in public. I've accommodated the employee's fear until recently, but it's now time to intervene because public speaking is part of the job description. Should I make a referral to the EAP now, or wait until the task is refused once more?

Answers

the EAP primarily as a counseling resource even though EAPs do other things as well. The perception of the EAP as a place to go only with mental health problems can fuel stigma and avoidance for some. Promoting the EAP as a desirable resource that's both pro-people and pro-organization requires active encouragement to change this perception. As a supervisor, you're an important part of this marketing strategy. With that kind of support, the EAP will become an attractive program with correspondingly high utilization.



Meet with your employee and discuss the nature of the position and its responsibilities. Be positive, hopeful, and supportive. Discuss how you've made allowances for their fear of speaking until now, but that going forward making work-related presentation is expected as part of the position. Ask your employee if you can anticipate cooperation. Pay attention to the answer, but also recommend the EAP as a resource. Your employee shared the shyness problem, so this step is appropriate. Don't counsel the employee. Offer training or other resources that the organization can provide or support. Anticipate change and cooperation going forward. If change isn't realized, make a formal referral to the EAP. The EAP will help your employee challenge habits of thinking and believing, and teach new behavioral responses that focus attention on the external social environment rather than internally on fear, anxiety, and social performance.

Notes: