

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



I like meetings because they bring people together. I've read a lot about making meetings efficient, but we still have problems with getting work done, nonparticipation, and low productivity. What efficiency tips can you offer that perhaps I haven't heard before?



It's easier for me to give feedback to a good performer than to do so with employees who are poor performers. I know the poor performer needs more feedback from me, but why do I resist? Is this a problem with other supervisors too?

Answers



Meetings can help people bond, but when that's the sole reason for their purpose, breakdown is ensured. Meetings should include selected individuals who gather as a team, all of whom then participate and work as a group to accomplish something. Can you say your meetings fit this model, or would another way to interact be better? Who isn't essential for a meeting? Although some employees will feel slighted when uninvited, educate staff about the need for efficiency. Pay attention to the solid reasons some offer when insisting on being included. It's a myth that all employees hate meetings. Some employees love meetings as distractions or social opportunities. Pay attention to how employees perform in meetings, and know that the EAP can help individuals who struggle with their inability to share work on a team, those who need to pull rank in the room or interrupt others, or those who have trouble with paying attention, staying on the subject, or respecting others.



Giving feedback is often more difficult to do with employees who perform poorly. The stress of confrontation and fear of what may follow is often the source of the resistance. A checklist or a method for giving feedback could help you approach employees with poor performance more frequently, which goes a long way to ensure employees aren't surprised at their annual review. One approach: 1) Create a list of the performance issues you wish to discuss; 2) Discuss the impact of each, and the employee's awareness of that impact; 3) Share what will or could ultimately happen if the performance issues aren't corrected; 4) Decide on a follow-up date and what should change by then; 5) Avoid diminishing the seriousness of performance problems with statements that relieve tension, such as, "This isn't a big deal, but you need to start making changes to..."; 6) Monitor for improvement and let your employees know when they're making progress and doing something well; 7) Consider calling

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



I became a manager because of my technical skills. I'd like to be more of an ideal manager with better people skills. Can the EAP help me?



How do I keep conflict and relationship problems in our department from interfering with customers and customer service?



Our workplace has a problem with everyone shifting blame to the other guy when things go wrong. How can we put an end to this dynamic, which does nothing to help us create a cohesive work environment and feel glad to all be on the same team?

Answers

the EAP for a consultation before meeting with the employee. The EAP supports you as a supervisor, and your employees.



Meet with the EAP to explore and assess your interpersonal skills. Being able to identify your own and other's emotions are skills that help guide you when dealing emotional situations within the office.

These emotional intelligence skills can be learned and improved on with education, awareness, exercises, and practice. Some of these behaviors can be challenging to learn because they require identifying and removing long-term ways of thinking. Short-term, goal-focused coaching can accelerate your progress. Meet with the EAP for a more in-depth discussion of emotional intelligence and how it applies to leadership performance.



Unfortunately, it's difficult to isolate conflict for very long. This is because it's the nature of "systems" that all things are eventually affected by what happens in any other part of the system. Although you can impose stopgap measures to temporarily prevent the negative influences of employee conflicts on customer service, those measures will eventually erode. It's better to establish procedures for resolving conflicts permanently and quickly. Rule #1 is to not accept ongoing conflict between employees. Turning a blind eye to an ongoing workplace conflict may quickly snowball into an out-of-control situation that affects everyone. The EAP can discuss approaches to conflict resolution that may succeed if you're willing to accept nothing less.



The "blame game" is a workplace dynamic in which employees seek to ensure their personal survival by shifting blame for failures to other parties. When it becomes a pattern of interaction, the blame game is more accurately viewed as a symptom of a toxic or problematic work culture. You can stop it by creating a more positive and shared work culture in which managers aren't afraid to use the "buck stops here" model of leadership. Blaming is a short-term solution that usually reinforces whatever dysfunction is provoking it. Blaming, by definition, means that lessons from mistakes are never learned, a frozen feedback loop exists, and morale problems are maintained - resulting in lower productivity. Focusing on positive solutions will help your office break the cycle of blame and improve your working environment.