

# FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

## Questions



How do I deal with an employee we hired very recently who does not appear to be a good culture fit for our organization? Performance is good, but issues with communication exist, and like-mindedness with the rest of our employees is lacking .



Should I avoid asking my employees to socialize with me? For example, at the end of a long week, asking one of them out for a drink ?

## Answers



Culture fit is viewed as important and can reduce conflicts and enhance productivity. It also helps reduce turnover. Unhappy employees tend to leave, so your goal should be to avoid that outcome. Don't dismiss culture fit as completely irrelevant to the job performance requirements, but you must describe specifically what you mean so that documentation can work—you can describe what you want and evaluate improvement later. Discuss the circumstances with the EAP and determine an approach to help your employee better assimilate to the work culture. Consider team issues, interpersonal communication, isolation, argumentative behavior, attitude issues, avoiding of associates, personal disposition, and buy-in to the organization's mission. Be aware that your employee may have personal problems and these could manifest as issues of culture fit.



This question has no pat answer unless you are bound by a code of conduct or work rule prohibiting such a practice. It is wise to consider the complex issues that exist when a manager initiates a request to socialize with a supervisee. Seldom discussed with supervisors is education and awareness about "supervisor power." Your position of control over an employee is a reality and a complex dynamic. It is something you can't deny, change, or temporarily put aside. Many supervisors have difficulty with this concept. They reject it because they feel self-aware enough and disciplined enough to wear two hats, that of an impartial friend and all-around good guy (or gal), and that of a strong leader who gets things done. Employees however, are very aware of your authority and supervisory role. They must weigh not only the benefit of a social invitation, but the repercussions of saying yes or no. This is defined as the conflict-of-interest dynamic. No matter how friendly and reassuring you are, you will not dispel that. Relationships between supervisors and supervisees vary dramatically across industries, work cultures, and circumstances. The above supports the argument against initiating social relationships in many of them, but do they match yours?

# Frontline Supervisor

## Questions



I don't like reprimanding employees or telling them what they have done wrong. How can supervisors have an easier time with these tense meetings?



The worst part about supervision for me is self-doubt. I am sure other supervisors experience the same problem and suffer in silence too. After all, you can't let people know you're doubting your ability to do the job. How can supervisors better manage this worry?



How should supervisors view or understand diversity in the workplace and use it as a resource to support the organization's mission?

## Answers



There is an old saying in customer service: "A complaint is a gift." This idea sees negative feedback or criticism as an opportunity to improve and grow. This same model applies to correcting employees. View a corrective interview as a gift that will benefit your employee's career. Consider the term "corrective interview" over "reprimand." It is more closely aligned with this model of supervision. See these meetings as opportunities to benefit employees. You will feel less punitive and more like a coach or leader. Be aware that employees who are your star performers may require more corrective interviews because they practice initiative and take more risks. Their higher productivity may come with more mistakes if they naively cross boundaries, unwittingly step on the wrong toes, or simply rub people the wrong way. It's part of the growth curve. A corrective interview is an opportunity to develop talent. See these meetings from this viewpoint and they will be easier to conduct, and more beneficial to your organization.



You've cited one of the reasons for the cliché "It's lonely at the top." There is hardly a supervisor or leader who has not wondered, no matter how briefly, whether he or she will cut it, succeed, or make significant contributions. Intervention with this sort of anxiety is mostly about maintaining perspective. You've succeeded in becoming a manager, and naturally that comes with pressure to perform. Take steps to get support. You will find confidential support at the EAP and quickly find reassurance, resources, and strategies to help you improve your skills and reduce negative self-talk. If needed, you can find one-shot, inexpensive, and short courses online that perfectly match the supervision concern you feel needs addressing.



Understand the business case for diversity in the workplace beyond it being simply the right thing to do. Diversity brings many benefits to the employer, including valued outcomes such as creativity, the generation of new ideas, discovery of solutions, and the ability to market to a diverse world economy. Diversity facilitates healthy challenge of the status quo that naturally comes from those who have different social backgrounds. Keep inclusion in mind and you will maximize the usefulness of this phenomenon in supervision. Everyone wants to feel included, but you should view "inclusiveness" as the energy source or the mechanism that excites employees about making contributions to the organization. Welcome diversity and it will become a positive force to support your organization's mission.