

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



Supervisors are supposed to play a role in reducing workplace stress. What areas of workplace stress most affect employees? Knowing what they are would help me consider strategies to at least deal with the most important issues. I know I can't intervene in everything.



How do I practice detachment so when I go home at the end of the day I am able to focus on home life, sleep better, and not be overly concerned about employee issues at work? Is this a learned skill or an ability a few lucky supervisors are born with?

Answers



You are correct. You won't be able to intervene in every issue, but there are broad categories of stress worth knowing about that can help you stay attuned to relationship and workplace dynamics with which interventions could reduce the impact of stress. Stress research usually focuses on 1) conflicts with supervisors, 2) complaints about the work culture and factors associated with it, and 3) dissatisfaction with making too minimal a contribution, not feeling like one belongs, is included, or fits in. This includes a feeling of not being valued for one's contributions to the achievements of the work unit. Keep these categories in mind in conversations with employees and when dealing with normal workplace conflict. They can alert you to take action, and this can reduce turnover if you jump on problems quickly and resolve them. Turn to the EAP to help you, as needed.



Detachment is more of an art than a skill. It comes with practice, and you get better over time by practicing letting go, observing your resistance, and making adjustments to improve your ability. Detachment allows you to become a more accomplished worker and contented, happy family member. There is always more to learn about detachment. You will not succeed all the time. No job that entails interacting with the human condition enjoys complete and utter detachment, because a continuum of problems guarantees new acute experiences will test your ability to let go. Imagine an emergency operating room physician who could not detach from work. Stress and its ultimate effects would incapacitate even the most skilled doctor. Working on detaching will help and guide you toward discovering a more happy personal and professional life.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



My employee has been no-call/no-show too many times, so we decided to let him go. He did visit the EAP months ago, but obviously it did not help. I am concerned I should have done more to help change this attendance pattern, but I am not sure what it would have been.



I am not a counselor; I am an electrician. However, I have known my employee for 20 years. I think the EAP could benefit from my opinion on his psychological problems. Should I keep this information to myself or suggest what I think this employee's issues might be?



I was reprimanded recently and was told to be more proactive in my management style. The leadership also wants my employees to fall in line with this approach. What is proactive management, and how do I instill this in employees? Can the EAP help with something like this?

Answers



Employees who are no-call/no-show may have severe personal problems, have other sources of financial support making the job unimportant, or have extreme ambivalence about the job for some reason. If you offer a second chance, ask your employee about his or her goals for the future with the company. Your referral to the EAP was an important step. You also stayed focused on performance which is critical. Realize however that you may never discover the explanation for the behavior. It's also important to realize that EAP can offer assessment and resources but it is up to the individual employee to utilize those resources.



When you communicate with the EAP, especially in writing, you should stick with the appropriate and necessary information to support the rationale for your supervisor referral. This may include quality of work, conduct, attendance, and other observable and measurable factors that can be documented. The EAP will not ask your opinion about what you think the underlying psychological causes for the employee's troubles might be. To do so immediately places you in an inappropriate role for which you are not qualified. There is nothing to prohibit or stop you from verbally telling the EAP what you think is going on with your employee, but do not expect the EAP to participate in a discussion about these issues, probe further, validate what you have to say, or rely on this information in conducting an assessment or when planning treatment.



Proactive means "anticipatory." Management wants your energies and resources used to think ahead, anticipate problems and issues, and do less "reacting" to problems your work unit experiences. Here's the key: When managing proactively, you strategize and target problems that have not happened yet in an effort to prevent them. You cannot just "think" proactively. Instead, you target the risk with interventions to reduce or eliminate them. The EAP is not an expert on your specific functions, but is experienced at coaching, analyzing, and examining the mandate you've been given. That assistance can help you keep on track and help ensure that you follow through on management's directive.