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Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ **I had an employee retort, “You have to earn my respect!” I’ve heard this before, but I say it’s manipulation. Supervisors deserve respect because of who we are and what we do. Can you discuss this often-heard phrase? I think younger supervisors are intimidated by it.**

■ **I am concerned about an employee who works *too* much. I would like to make a referral to the EAP, but until now I have given only outstanding performance evaluations. The employee also spends time helping other employees. This is a very unusual level of overwork. What could explain it?**

■ **My employee complained to human resources about my bullying. I am not a bully, but I use humor**

“**Respect is earned**” may sound valid or like common sense, but it is more fitting for an advertising slogan than for employee expectations in the workplace. Respectful behavior and respect (as in high opinion or admiration) are different things. Certainly the position you hold as supervisor entitles you to demonstrated respect from employees beginning on day one, because you represent the employer. You manage and oversee the employment relationship. And you have all its responsibilities. Your supervision style is something your employees may come to admire and respect, however, and this is what is usually meant by the phrase *respect is earned*. You may hear this one-liner from difficult or troubled employees, but it is typically an attempt to manipulate or control the relationship for a specific purpose.

Create a corrective plan with a reasonable workload with which to comply. Encourage a self-referral to the EAP based on your concern about the level of overwork. Later, if needed, make a more formal referral for failure to maintain the level of performance standards you specified in the plan (or mini-contract.) Employees with strong work ethics are to be admired, but it appears you are observing something far different. All employees bring their personalities to work, and sometimes these include mental health issues. These issues do not necessarily interfere with occupational functioning or become measurable concerns for management. However, when they do, disturbances in personal and work boundaries will typically become noticeable. EAPs are in an ideal spot to help employers address issues of this sort so valuable workers with treatable conditions can remain gainfully employed. Obsessive-compulsive behaviors, codependency issues, drug use, or a mental health problem with a manic component to it could each explain the behavior you are witnessing.

Bullying in the workplace is pervasive and is now viewed as a serious occupational hazard by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety. The 2017 survey on workplace bullying was released recently by the

with my employees, and I guess my dry humor didn't sit well with this worker. I was not considered a bully by HR, but I am trying to change my style. Hasn't bullying been overblown?

Bullying Institute. Their key findings: 19% of Americans are bullied at work, and another 19% witness it; 61% of Americans are aware of abusive conduct in the workplace; 70% of perpetrators are men; 60% of targets are women; 61% of bullies are bosses; 40% of bullied targets are believed to suffer adverse health effects. The above reflects the serious human and economic costs of bullying. Although you were not found to be a bully, making employees the target of jokes can be intimidating and lead to a host of other employment-related complaints like harassment. Since you are desirous of having meaningful relationships with your employees, the EAP can help. Start with altering your communication style so you nurture more satisfying workplace relationships.

■ **How can the EAP help my employees with customer service stress?**

Consider surveying employees to see where their “pain points” are regarding customer service stress. This is a broad topic and could include burnout, physical demands, dealing with angry customers, training needs, resources issues, and pressure to meet management expectations versus customer satisfaction, or feeling unsure about one’s role, performance review issues, and more. A quick search for “types of customer service stress” can lead you to a good list. Use these to query your group, and with this needs analysis in hand, you can meet with the EAP and better discuss how the EAP can meet the needs of your group or individual employees. Retaining good customer service workers by helping them deal with stress is a smart move—and a cost-beneficial one that could help you retain your stars.

■ **I have an employee who comes to work with a slight smell of alcohol on the breath. He appears perfectly sober and capable of work. I haven't had a problem at all with him. I have not referred for testing because I am not suspicious he is under the influence. Should I be?**

Don't ignore this any longer. You should review your organization’s drug and alcohol policy for guidance on how to proceed. Also consult with the EAP and your manager. Workplaces are different and so are drug and alcohol policies. While a hospital may prohibit alcohol consumption by employees during the workday, other business organizations that entertain customers may have no such provision – even while employees are away from a facility on a lunch break. Alcohol on the breath in the morning may signal maintenance drinking; the employee consumes alcohol to prevent symptoms of withdrawal, which would be visible if the blood alcohol level were to drop. High tolerance in such instances would allow the employee to appear sober, even though he has a relatively high blood alcohol content, which makes him a safety risk.

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