

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource -- Employees

State Employee Assistance Program 1-800-308-4934 (Toll Free)

■ **I have a valuable employee that I cannot afford to lose or fire. He has severe performance issues despite his being my most knowledgeable computer systems guy. I can make an EAP referral, but when it comes to leverage like job security, forget it. So, what can I do?**

Obviously, you have not yet decided that your employee's performance is unacceptable. You want him to change because his performance is problematic, but you are resistant to facing the challenges and disruption replacing the position will bring. The advantage of your employee remaining on the job, despite the problems, outweighs your desire to see him go. If your employee's behavior and performance problems worsen, you will begin to feel less ambivalent, and your desire and willingness to replace him will increase. When you reach this point, leverage of job security will be available as a motivator to consider using the EAP. Of course, you risk a crisis of an acute performance incident as time goes by. Many supervisors experience the dilemma you describe, but the real problem is making a decision that things must change now. You may be more ready than you think. Regardless of whether your employee accepts, make a referral now.

■ **I have an open-door policy as a manager, but a couple of supervisors I oversee have demonstrated their anger with me for allowing employees to end-run to me. How do I manage an open door policy so it is a productive process for the work unit?**

Open-door policies can be effective for identifying issues affecting the workplace, improving morale, and taking advantage of the desire employees have to let "the top" know what's going on. However, an open-door policy should exist along with a trusting relationship with your immediate supervisors and department heads by discussing with them your philosophy about open-door policies. Do you reduce conflict by asking supervisors to keep you abreast of important issues so you don't first learn about them from an employee coming to see you? Do you assure managers that you will not use the open-door policy to undermine them? Do you ask supervisors to let you know if they believe your open-door policy has led to a decision they think undermined their authority? Have you explained to supervisors what types of things you will keep confidential that are shared by employees? And, most importantly, do you encourage employees who come to you to communicate first with their immediate supervisor about their concerns before coming to you?

■ **My employee's husband came to the job site unannounced and engaged in a loud argument with**

The behavior of the spouse is outside of your employee's control, but her participation in a disturbing argument at work is something that should concern you as an employer. An incident of this nature could be a prelude to a violent act. A referral to the EAP could prevent it. Your employee is

her. She has no job performance problems, but it was a severe disruption. Is a supervisor referral appropriate, or is the incident outside the employee's control? What will the EAP do?

a victim of unannounced provocative behavior from her husband's arrival at work. Now is a good time for her to consider what she can do to prevent a similar incident in the future. So be supportive, but base the referral on your concerns about the incident and its affect on employees and workplace harmony. Alternatively, you could first informally encourage your employee visit the EAP to deal with the obvious marital discord. She may be motivated to visit the EAP after such an experience.

■ My employee is teased and picked on by coworkers, but I think all of us agree that he is well liked. He accepts it, and goes along with the teasing, however, I am a bit worried because sometimes I think it goes too far. Should I be concerned?

The important part of your description of this problem is your belief that the teasing goes too far. Would you allow yourself to be treated by others in the same way? If not, you can conclude that your employee is the victim of harassment, and therefore you know or should know it is offensive. Although employers generally rely upon employees coming forward and complaining about the way they are treated, some employees will not. Your good judgment is telling you that something is wrong, and you should intervene to curtail the inappropriate behavior. Although your employee does not complain and appears accepting of his role as the brunt of others teasing and jokes, you cannot assume that he is not adversely affected by it and that he does not harbor anger and resentment toward you and his coworkers. In the extreme, this could lead to an incident of workplace violence that could have been prevented.

■ I know employees are angry about having no pay raises every year. As a result, I hesitate to praise them for a good job because I fear they will shrug it off in anger or reject it. What should I do, praise employees or stay away from them?

Naturally, you feel bad about employees not getting the financial compensation they deserve, but demonstrating your appreciation in any way practical is a good idea, no matter what reaction you get. It is possible that an employee will take advantage of it and reject your attempt to point out his or her good work, but others will appreciate it. Praising employees never made morale worse. Although hard to believe, money plays less of a role in why employees quit a job. Instead, not feeling appreciated is the number one reason they leave according to the U.S. Department of Labor. So, not demonstrating appreciation will compound the problems you face.

NOTES:

Watch for the upcoming schedule of supervisory training classes for 2005-06.

