

# 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 experienced much discontentment among my employees over the past year. There are a lot of complaints and morale problems. I decided to conduct a survey and overnight the mood changed. I guess I did the right thing, correct?**

Employee surveys are powerful tools that can gather information and root out underlying issues affecting employee productivity. The improvement in morale results from the anticipation by employees that management will respond to their concerns. Surveys allow employees to provide information, often anonymously, and this process allows them to vent frustrations. Employees feel temporary relief, and their collective attitude improves. Their response to the survey makes it worthwhile, but there is another side of the coin. Now that you have completed the survey, be sure to do something meaningful with the results. Not doing so will risk deeper morale and attitude problems. Work with management and human resources when considering a survey so they are included in its formulation. This is important because the needed changes that the survey identifies may require approval or cooperation from them.

---

■ **I am hearing throughout the work unit that employees are taking "mental-health days." They call in sick because of stress. Is one person copying the other? Can the EAP help? And, should I crack down?**

"Mental-health days" typically refer to the questionable use of sick leave by employees to "take a break" from what they perceive as overwork or difficult workplace experiences. Although most organizations frown upon mental-health days, and intervene when there is inappropriate use of sick leave, the leave issues may be a symptom of larger problems within your work unit. Consult with the EAP on your observations. Together, you may identify what is contributing to leave patterns and the shortchanging of productivity. Some employees may be "mimicking" the behavior of co-workers without due cause, but others may be suffering with the distress of a work environment they feel does not support them. Deal with the leave issues individually in consultation with your HR adviser and you may avoid bigger problems lurking below the surface of sick leave abuse.

---

■ **I expect well-paid employees to do their jobs and take care of their own self-esteem issues. I don't have time to worry about their feelings, praise them all**

Much research has centered on the relationship employees must have with a work organization to maximize their productivity. You represent the employer in your relationship with them, and how you manage that relationship has an economic impact for the company because it influences productivity. So the issues go beyond your employees' "self-esteem" and "feelings." Studies have demonstrated that what makes people happy in a family also applies to the workplace. Have you heard your employees

**the time, or give them “warm fuzzies.” Am I not measuring up to what a supervisor should be?**

say, “We are just like a big family here.” Such a statement indicates high morale among your employees. If caring and appreciation are communicated, chances are employees are happy on the job and you are feeling good about their improved productivity. You are the key to helping employees feel cared about and supported. Are you sending this message? If so, chances are you are doing what’s best for the work unit and the organization.

**■ There are many employees under my supervision. I don’t have time to resolve every dispute that pops up among them. When should I step in?**

It would be great to supervise people who get along well all the time, but the harsh truth is conflicts will erupt. When they do, it’s not necessarily your job to intervene. In many cases, the best way to deal with bickering employees is to adopt a hands-off policy. Keep your distance. Let them resolve their own issues. Supervisors who try to referee every conflict usually breed more conflicts. Employees may figure that they can get your attention by butting heads with a coworker, so conflicts can multiply. What’s worse, your quick intervention teaches employees that they need not take responsibility for getting along on their own. To determine if you should get involved, ask yourself the following questions: Does the conflict threaten the ability of employees to perform their jobs? Are the employees in conflict prone to violence? Does the conflict involve serious allegations relating to harassment, discrimination, or theft?

**■ My employee frequently forgets to punch out on the time clock. We have strict rules, and he has been disciplined frequently. I am afraid he is going to lose his job. I will refer him to the EAP, but if he is just absent minded, the EAP can’t do much, correct?**

Many supervisors think EAPs only work with employees who have mental health or substance abuse problems. However, EAPs also help employees discover practical solutions to simpler problems like the one you describe. Your employee may be forgetful for many reasons, including an undiagnosed health condition. Referral to the EAP based upon the performance issue is key to its discovery. Absentmindedness is usually a symptom of a larger problem, not a personality quirk, especially when so much is at stake if failure to punch out continues.

**NOTES:**

Are your employees suffering from the effects of hurricane Katrina? Don’t hesitate to suggest the EAP for disaster recovery issues. Call 1-800-308-4934.

