

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

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

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■ **I returned from medical leave to find that my temporary replacement made me look bad. My employees say my replacement did a better job treating everyone fairly than I do. I think I'm a fair supervisor; but apparently, I'm not seen that way. How can I prove that I'm fair?**

Rather than trying to prove that you're fair, commit to adopting certain skills and behaviors that will contribute to a more positive work environment for your staff. Examples include listening respectfully and patiently to employees' ideas and opinions, following up after they submit suggestions or make requests; promptly sharing information that affects their job security; involving them in collective decision-making; enforcing workplace rules consistently (so that you don't play favorites); and always telling the truth. In addition to enhancing your stature as an effective leader, your commitment to fairness can influence your team's health. According to a recent medical research study, reported on by the American Medical Association (PR, AMA, Justice at Work, Nov. 10, 2005), a sense of fair treatment at work can reduce workers' stress levels, even lowering the risk of coronary heart disease among employees.

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■ **A group of my employees is swapping investment ideas and trading online. I don't know if they trade with company computers, but I suspect they do. Conflicts have emerged, and I'm worried about the boundaries of this activity. Can the EAP help?**

Meet with your employees and tell them that their personal investing activities must not take place during work hours or with company resources such as computers. Explain that their activities have caused disruption. Let them know that the EAP is ideally suited to provide counseling about financial matters, although it will not provide investing advice. The EAP can help employees access a network of financial consultants with expertise in personal budgeting, managing credit card debt, taxes, insurance, retirement planning, and estate planning. Some of them may need more help than you know. With the advent of easy online trading, the temptation to participate in this risky activity is growing dramatically, and it can become addictive in nature. Like compulsive gambling, it can lead to financial ruin if one is not careful.

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■ **Last year, we began offering the EAP to our employees. I have heard that the utilization rate in my division is low. Is it possible that my employees have fewer problems? I think there is a need for the program, but what**

Consider welcoming the EAP to your division and giving employees organized forums with educational presentations pertinent to their needs or interests. EAPs develop promotional strategies for organizations as a whole, but they always welcome feedback from management and discussion about what else they can do. Naturally, employees are concerned about confidentiality—the most crucial obstacle to program utilization—but seeing the EAP presentations and being reminded about the confidential nature of using an EAP usually resolves this problem. Utilization development is an ongoing process. Be sure to regularly

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**should my role be in improving utilization?**

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■ **I made an embarrassing mistake while giving a presentation to our board of directors, and now I fear I've lost a lot of credibility among the top brass. My boss told me to forget about it, but I'm sure my future here is now in jeopardy. How can I salvage my reputation?**

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■ **One of my employees broke up with his girlfriend, and he's despondent. He tells anyone who will listen how unhappy and confused he feels. His peers are sympathetic, but he's still sad and distracted. His work remains acceptable, but should I refer him to the EAP?**

encourage your supervisors to consider supervisor referrals for employees with performance problems.

After making an embarrassing mistake, it's common to magnify its importance and even view it as a catastrophe that will cause lasting damage. But such gloom-and-doom perceptions are usually overblown. Heed your boss's advice: get over it and move on. Your challenge now is to view the situation in context. Even if you've temporarily lost some credibility, treat the incident as a blip in an otherwise stellar, long-term track record of performance. Vow to gain back any credibility you've lost—and then some—with each subsequent contribution you make. Exceeding expectations will endear you to your boss. People tend to remember the most recent events when judging performance, so as time passes and you find new ways to impress the leaders of your organization, your embarrassing mistake will fade from their memory. Recognizing which mistakes we should learn from and which mistakes we should dismiss is a life skill. The EAP can help you put your situation in perspective if you continue to struggle.

His “work” may be acceptable, but his performance is problematic if you are documenting his distraction. Consider that performance includes attitude, attendance, and conduct on the job, as well as the quality of work. Although you can't focus on his plight as a supervisor, a referral is appropriate because distraction can be documented. People handle despondency in different ways. Some internalize it and try to mask their pain. Others, like your employee, want to discuss their experience. Doing some of this at work is quite normal, but if a worker repeatedly shares his unhappiness and confusion with his co-workers, it can become a workplace distraction. There's also the danger that his sadness will prove contagious and adversely affect everyone's attitude. What's more, well-intentioned peers may give him inappropriate advice on how to handle the problem. In short, the present behavior is hardly the best way for your employee to work through a difficult breakup. By referring him to the EAP for support during this rocky period, you give him a safe, confidential environment to gain perspective and develop coping tools under the guidance of a trained professional.

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**NOTES:**

Celebrate March EAP Awareness Month! Attend a supervisor training class.