

## The Frontline Supervisor

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*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees*  
**Solutions Employee Assistance Program 1-800-526-3485**

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**Q-** *I am not sure that I am cut out to supervise people. I hesitate to confront my employees, and I dread meeting with them in a group. Sometimes I delegate supervision to others, and I avoid meeting with complainers. Should I look for another job or use the EAP to help me?*

**A -** Before you conclude that you're not equipped to manage people, discuss your concerns with an EA professional. Each of the issues you've mentioned is a common challenge that supervisors face. Many supervisors dislike confrontation and take pains to avoid it. You may never learn to enjoy it, but you can develop strategies to communicate clearly and diplomatically in potentially adversarial situations. Dreading team meetings may stem from shyness, discomfort with group dynamics, or other factors. The EAP can help you develop strategies to assert yourself in groups and become more comfortable leading discussions and giving presentations. Delegation is actually a learned skill. Effective supervisors usually learn that in order to gain power, they have to give some of it up. So the fact that you allow others to step into your role may actually work to your advantage, as long as you remain accountable for the results.

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**Q -** *My boss says I need to develop better ways to motivate my staff. But I think I do a really good job of explaining what they must do and what's at stake. Doesn't that make me a strong motivator?*

**A -** There is more to motivating employees than telling them what to do and why it matters. You also need to arouse their passion about work. That requires an awareness of their "hot buttons"—a keen understanding of what they value most. Examples include recognition, money, flexibility, job security, or freedom and independence. The only way you can identify what drives someone is to listen and learn. Chat with each of your employees to find out about their goals, aspirations, and special skills and talents that they want to apply more fully to their jobs. Be sure to ask what causes them to feel motivated. They will tell you. In the meantime, assume that enjoying personal growth in one's work, earning sincere praise, and doing meaningful work are three core motivators for just about everyone.

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**Q** - *I referred an employee to the EAP and she seemed perfectly happy to go. However, I have learned that she never went. I didn't ask why, because her performance is fine now, but what could I have done, if anything, to make the employee more likely to follow through on my referral?*

**A** - Any of these steps may facilitate your employee's following through with a supervisor's referral to the EAP. All have been tried with various EAPs, and all have worked. 1) Speak to the EAP if you have questions about any of them. 2) Reassure the employee that the program is confidential. 3) Say you won't discuss the referral with anyone in the work setting. 4) Assure the employee of confidentiality. 5) Mention the name of the EA professional with whom you spoke to discuss performance issues, and say that he or she is expecting a call from the employee. 6) Provide the phone number of the EAP. Have a tentative appointment you have arranged in cooperation with the EAP, and if the employee accepts the referral, offer it as one option or cancel it. 7) Allow the employee to visit the first EAP assessment on paid time.

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**Q** - *Our organization will lose nearly 15 percent of its employees in a planned downsizing this year. Should I anticipate that productivity will be negatively affected, and if so, is there anything I can do about it? Will employees simply not care about productivity this year?*

**A** - Anger and anxiety will play powerful roles and may affect some employees' productivity as they seek to cope with the uncertainty of downsizing. Many supervisors assume that all employees will suffer a lack of productivity when downsizing looms and anxiety grows, but this is not necessarily the case. Productivity may increase for some employees. These will tend to be employees who have a high level of insecurity about their positions but who also have a high need to work. In other words, those who can afford to lose their jobs the least may demonstrate more productivity than usual. On the other hand, downsizing anxiety may adversely affect the productivity of employees who have a low need to work. Offering support and effectively planning communication as downsizing is implemented is important for both groups, regardless of anticipated productivity levels, because the personal reaction of each employee cannot be predicted or generalized to a larger group.

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**Q** - *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?*

**A** - 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 coworkers, 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.