



The Frontline Supervisor

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

Q - In supervisor training, we are strongly warned not to ask employees personal questions or to discuss employees' personal problems. I find this a difficult task because it makes me appear cold. Can you discuss this a little more?

A - Discussing an employee's personal problems usually results in a temporary cessation of job performance problems that may be caused by the employee's personal issues. After such discussions, there is often mutual satisfaction between the supervisor and the employee. The employee feels gratified and re-energized to exercise greater control of his or her personal problem and its symptoms, and the supervisor feels he or she successfully counseled the employee to change his or her behavior. These discussions are seductive, but hazardous, because they protract the performance problems, lead to crisis, and can serve to perpetuate underlying chronic disease. Often these discussions are motivated by the supervisor's natural desire to avoid disciplining an employee or participating in constructive confrontation. Consider consulting with the EAP to better understand your supervisory role and effective integration of the EAP in supervision.

Q - An employee disregards the EAP because he thinks people should only see a Ph.D. psychologist, and the EAP staff he was referred to lack a Ph.D. (although they are certified and/or licensed professionals). How can I respond to this complaint?

A - Your employee may not understand the EAP's role. It is not designed as a treatment center for mental health issues. Rather, the EAP's purpose is to assess and investigate an individual's problems and, if necessary, provide a referral to appropriate resources. Such a referral may include having an employee see a Ph.D. psychologist. EA professionals are highly qualified to perform assessments and make determinations on the best course of action to either assist employees or refer them to more specialized types of help. To help your employee reconsider use of the EAP, let him know that EA professionals are not entry-level professionals and that experience in addition to qualifications are what count. If your employee is looking for effective interviewing, motivational counseling, and skills in helping develop a plan for improvement, the EAP is the best place to go.

Volume 7.1

Call Solutions EAP for free, confidential consultation regarding an employee you may want to refer to the EAP: 1-800-526-3485.

Look for Solutions on-line: www.solutions-eap.com

Ask Better Questions

In an article on the Harvard Business Review blog by John Baldoni, he discusses the importance of a leader knowing how to ask good questions. This is one way to develop better connections with others. We may avoid questions, afraid of what answers we will receive, but this can only lead to more difficulties. He points out that it is often not what is asked but how it is asked. He has four suggestions for leaders who are looking to improve their skills in this area.

Be curious. If you're doing all the talking, you can't hear what others need. Being the first and last person to speak is not a sign of strength but more likely closer to the behavior of a blowhard who may feel insecure. People may feel cut off and that their input is less important than what you are saying. If you are curious, you'll find out much more essential information from employees, customers, and vendors.

Be open-ended. Asking questions that get people to reveal what they are thinking, not just details of what happened can result in surprising information. They may be waiting to give more details but unsure that you want to hear them. Asking leading questions give people an opportunity to share a bit more of themselves. Using *what, how, and why* questions make this more likely to happen.

Be engaged. Show you are interested by your body language and by verbal acknowledgement. We all appreciate it when we feel someone is listening to what we have to say and therefore tend to reveal more. It's another good way to connect with others. Leaning forward, keeping direct eye contact, verbally acknowledging what is being said, asking questions about the information are all effective ways to let others know you are engaged and interested in what they have to say.

Dig deeper. Believing that no news is good news is a big mistake. To avoid giving the impression that you want to hear nothing but positive information, dig for details without judging or straying into recriminations. Go after the whole story. Keep in mind that team problems are your problems.

There are times when it is important to take things a more leisurely pace and with a more solicitous tone, especially if you are dealing with a customer concern or coaching an employee. Not all conversations need to be under the gun. Try to stay aware of the individual situation and respond accordingly.

Doing some or all of the suggestions above with the goal of gathering honest information will help improve your connections to others and can help create a foundation for deepening levels of trust. The result can lead to improved performance and an increased sense of team.

Source: Harvard Business Review blog: <http://blogs.hbr.org>