

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

January 2005

# Frontline Supervisor



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■ **I found myself advising my employee about her personal problems when she disclosed them in a corrective interview. I suddenly realized how easy this is to do. I know I should refer her to the EAP, but isn't it offensive to say to the employee, "don't tell me, tell the EAP?"**

**Admittedly, it is difficult** not to respond with an idea or a possible solution to a personal problem when one is disclosed in a corrective interview. This does not mean that your employee must experience rejection from you for sharing something personal. Empathetically listening to your employee and acting supportive is a legitimate role for a supervisor. It does not imply that you are offering solutions, counseling your employee, or involving yourself in the personal problem. Suggesting that the employee use the EAP if something personal is contributing to job performance problems is also a good move in a corrective interview. It frequently prompts a disclosure of some personal problem. This can make a supervisor referral based on job performance problems even more meaningful for the employee.

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■ **Integrity ranks high among the expectations of our customers. Is this a corporate issue, or is it one for me to manage at the work unit level? Should I be careful to hire employees who appear to be of strong moral character? Or is there more to it?**

**Integrity is everybody's** business. Due to recent ethics crises among America's large corporations, integrity has moved to center stage. As a supervisor or team leader, you have a key role in preserving it. Integrity has a unique definition within your work unit, and you should examine closely what this means for you. It is more than choosing people you perceive to be of good character and expecting them to act ethically. Here are a few tips: Recognize that the world of work creates situations that tempt employees to be less than faithful to the values of the organization. Help your employees see the benefits and rewards of maintaining integrity in their business relationships. Start by orienting new employees to your work unit, its values, and what that means for their respective positions. Create opportunities to solve issues and ethical dilemmas that challenge integrity. And, provide employees with inspiration and encouragement to use integrity in their affairs. Most importantly, hold employees accountable for acting in concert with the values of the work unit and the organization.

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■ **My employees say they like me because I am an easy boss. I think they appreciate the fact that I am not demanding, and**

**You probably can't be a** successful boss if you remain "one of the guys," unwilling to make tough decisions or be firm when necessary. If your employees are productive and dependable, chances are you're doing fine so far. However, consider whether, in an effort to be liked by your employees, you participate in behaviors that diminish your effectiveness.

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am more like “one of the guys.” I think they respect me more for it. Do you think that I am right?

For example, do you share gripes with your employees about the organization, or criticize upper management, particularly your boss? It is not unusual for employees to participate in venting sessions, but when supervisors join in, they lose credibility. Some supervisors look the other way when work rules are violated, model inappropriate language and conduct on the job, and participate in other activities not related to work. Many of these supervisors pride themselves on “being one of guys,” but it is unlikely the employees they supervise respect them for this behavior.

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■ **I became a new supervisor six months ago, but have discovered that I am too bossy. I am trying to change, but it’s a struggle. I tend to have a “I-am-the-boss-so-do-as-I-say” approach. Perhaps I fear I won’t be taken seriously. How do I change?**

**Most people who become** supervisors are chosen for their position because they are good workers. They develop supervision skills on the job. Many supervisors model the supervision style of their last boss at the start. Was your last supervisor autocratic? If so, that may explain your approach. If not, you may have turned to this approach because it “works.” It’s a sure way to get employees to respond. Of course, this style of supervision has many negative consequences for employees, you, and the workplace so change is a good idea. Your awareness of the need for change is a big step. The EAP can help you identify some of the underlying issues that perpetuate your supervision style and help you find and develop strategies for the changes you desire.

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■ **How do I manage an employee who has enormous clout within the company, but in my opinion is not performing well? He’s been here for 20 years, and I have only been here for only three years.**

**Employees who are visible** and well-known within the organization, or who are adept at building relationships with others, may appear to have significant leverage or pull. Others may perceive this as clout. These employees do not communicate in a routine fashion like other employees. Instead, they go beyond the conventional relationship to communicate more frequently, and it pays off in what is often perceived as a higher social standing. The unspoken message may seem to be that they are “untouchable,” but in practice few organizations will tolerate unsatisfactory performance from employees in deference to their popularity. Your employee may be more trusted because he has been around longer, but you can build your own clout by communicating frequently with your supervisor, and making sure that he or she is kept informed about the issues you are attempting to resolve with this employee. Effective documentation is crucial to managing your employee, and you should not hesitate to consult with the EA professional regarding sensitive issues as you proceed.

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