

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

October 2013

# Frontline Supervisor



UConn Health Center EAP 860-679-2877 or 800-852-4392

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■ **I like meetings because they bring people together. I've read a lot about making meetings efficient, but we still have problems with getting work done, nonparticipation, and low productivity. What efficiency tips can you offer that perhaps I have not heard before?**

**Meetings can** help people bond, but when that is the sole reason for their purpose, breakdown is ensured. Meetings should include selected individuals who gather as a team, all of whom then participate and work as a group to accomplish something. Can you say your meetings fit this model, or would another way to interact be better? Who is not essential for a meeting? Although some employees will feel slighted when uninvited, educate staff about the need for efficiency. Pay attention to solid reasons some offer along with their insistence on being included. It is a myth that all employees hate meetings. Some employees love meetings as distractions or social opportunities. Pay attention to how employees perform in meetings, and know that the EAP can help individuals who struggle with their inability to share work on a team, those who need to pull rank in the room or interrupt others, or those who have trouble with paying attention, staying on the subject, or respecting others.

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■ **I became a manager because of my technical skills. I'd like to be more of an ideal manager with better people skills. Can the EAP help me?**

**Meet with the EAP** to explore your desire to improve your interpersonal skills. When you become aware of your emotions, and identify the emotions of others so you can manage yourself more effectively in relationships, you are applying emotional intelligence skills. These skills can be learned and improved on with education, awareness, exercises, and practice. Some of these behaviors can be challenging to learn if they require identifying and removing long-term ways of thinking. Short-term, goal-focused counseling can accelerate your progress. Meet with the EAP for a more in-depth discussion of emotional intelligence and how it applies to leadership performance. Find and read "What Makes a Leader?" by Daniel Goleman, from the January 2004 *Harvard Business Review*. It's an excellent starting point for your discussion in your meeting with the EAP. Go to: <http://hbr.org/2004/01/what-makes-a-leader>.

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■ **It is easier for me to give feedback to a good performer than to do so with employees who are poor performers. I know the poor performer needs**

**Giving feedback** to good performers is pleasant and easy. But it's often difficult to do with employees who are poor performers. The stress of confrontation and fear of what may follow explain the resistance. A checklist or a method for giving negative feedback will help you approach those employees more frequently. You'll also avoid nasty surprises for the poor-performing employees at their annual review. One approach:

**more feedback from me, but why do I resist? Is this a problem with other supervisors too?**

1) Create a list of the performance issues you wish to discuss; 2) Discuss the impact of each, and the employee's awareness of that impact; 3) Share what will or could ultimately happen if the performance issues are not corrected; 4) Decide on a follow-up date and what should change by then; 5) Avoid diminishing the seriousness of performance problems with statements that relieve tension, such as "This is not a big deal, but you need to start making changes to..."; 6) Always offer help, resources, and the EAP to support the changes you require.

**How do I keep conflict and relationship problems in our department from interfering with customers and customer service?**

**Unfortunately, it** is difficult to isolate conflict for very long. This is because the nature of "systems" dictates that all things are eventually affected by what happens in any other part of the system. Although you can impose stopgap measures to temporarily prevent the negative influences of employee conflicts on customer service, those measures will eventually erode. It is better to establish procedures for resolving conflicts permanently and quickly. Rule #1 is not accepting perpetual conflict between employees. Unlike a family conflict model that may be perpetual, the nature of employment conflict is governed by the influence and leverage afforded by wages and compensation. These things can be used to motivate employees to resolve their differences. The key is management's insistence on it. The EAP can discuss approaches to conflict resolution that will succeed if you are willing to accept nothing less.

**Our workplace has a problem with everyone shifting blame to the other guy when things go wrong. How can we put an end to this dynamic, which does nothing to help us create a cohesive work environment and feel glad to all be on the same team?**

**The blame game** is a workplace dynamic in which employees seek to ensure their personal survival by shifting blame for business failures to other parties. When it becomes a pattern of interaction, the blame game is more accurately viewed as a symptom of a toxic or problematic work culture. You can stop it by creating a more positive and shared work culture in which managers are not afraid to use the "buck stops here" model of leadership. Blaming is a short-term solution that usually reinforces whatever dysfunction is provoking it. Blaming by definition means that lessons from mistakes are never learned, a frozen feedback loop exists, and morale problems are maintained, resulting in lower productivity. Unfortunately, knee-jerk reactions to blame others reinforce the cycle.

## NOTES