

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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■ **Which one of these practices negatively impacts morale the most: failing to praise and reward employees, micromanaging, or poor communication?**

Any of these workforce management practices may contribute to morale problems, but poor communication consistently ranks #1 as the leading complaint affecting productivity in modern businesses around the world. Why is this? The answer is that managers either don't know what to do about it or they don't have systems in place to ensure better communication, or both. To improve communication, make sure employees and management are educated about the importance of communication, and teach employees how to communicate effectively. Literally teach them about how to give feedback, communicate in a timely way, and share information properly, and create ways that employees can cross-dialog with each other regularly. Consider rewarding good communication. Make communication part of the work unit or workplace culture with systems that keep communication moving. Internal memos, company news, and special communications about corporate board decisions are "nice to haves," but they will not fill the intimate communication void that often exists in the workplace. Investigate getting some consultative help from the EAP about communication education or even ideas on strategic goals to advance your initiatives in this area.

■ **I have a few employees who can't seem to break away from Facebook. They use their smartphones to keep up with it. This is getting ridiculous, and it is negatively affecting productivity. Telling people they cannot use a smartphone won't work, and I need to do something. Is this Facebook Addiction?**

Although Facebook Addiction is not a medically recognized disorder, there are plenty of accounts of Facebook users experiencing serious, adverse effects on their social and occupational functioning from being unable to stay away from Facebook. Your first step is to share your expectations regarding the use or nonuse of smartphones during the workday. If a policy doesn't exist, then insist on three conditions that must not be violated: 1) technology devices cannot be used in such a manner that they bother others or become an annoyance, 2) technology device usage cannot slow down business or work flow, and 3) technology device usage cannot cause loss of an employee's focus on other matters important to the employer. You can then quantify violations of these standards and refer employees to the EAP who struggle to comply.

■ **I know that leadership has little to do with what I know or say, but instead**

Successful leadership is first grounded in competence, so there must be a foundation in your ability to do something well. But where are you leading your employees and the work unit? One common key failing of

with what I do that influences others. Can you give an example of one critical mistake that's common in leadership failure and how the EAP can help leaders be successful?

leadership is the failure to establish a vision. Effective leadership requires a vision about where you want to go. Without this vision and a set of goals to match, you lack something to rally your employees around. You can't point to the mountaintop and get people behind you. This lack of vision can cause a leader to drift, making day-to-day decisions that feel unconnected to something larger. It becomes difficult to organize details, and the leader feels unsure of what he or she is trying to accomplish. Problems will mount, such as unhealthy coping behaviors. The leader will use fear to control employees, insisting on the importance of his or her role, but may actually feel insecure, withdrawn, depressed, and resistant to see the growing negative reality. The EAP can help a leader face changes that must be made, examine personal issues making problems worse, overcome fear, and offer support as a turnaround plan is implemented.

■ What are the five most commonly perpetrated bullying behaviors?

Research varies, but according to the Workplace Bullying Institute, the five most common bullying behaviors are 1) falsely accusing the victim of errors not actually made (“Oh, now look what you’ve done”), but refusing to show or prove any error. 2) Staring, glaring, or behaving nonverbally in order to intimidate, but clearly showing hostility. 3) Discounting the person’s thoughts or feelings in meetings with peers (“Gee, duh, thanks for sharing, Susan.”) 4) Using the silent treatment to “ice out” and separate the victim from others. 5) Making up rules on the fly that the bully himself or herself does not follow but has then imposed on the victim. Understanding the broad range of bullying behaviors can help you spot them. To learn more, visit www.workplacebullying.org.

■ What is the difference between constructive conflict and nonconstructive (destructive) conflict? How can I tell the difference in order to curtail one type but not the other? I don't fear conflict, but I'd like to avoid useless warring between my employees.

Almost any conflict in the workplace (apart from violence) has the potential for a positive outcome. The discerning factor is whether both parties are willing to compromise and work through their differences. If one party resists, insisting on the defeat of the other, then the conflict is less likely to end constructively. Intervention or a third-party resolution is then needed to resolve it. For example, an argument between two managers concerning who is in charge of directing an administrative assistant's work may begin as a personality clash, ego problem, or power struggle, but with compromise can evolve into a new solution for managing work flow efficiency. Educate your employees about conflict resolution strategies. Your EAP is an ideal source for this education. They can identify resources or offer other solutions. When employees are knowledgeable about conflict dynamics, they are more willing to let go and find the middle ground.

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