

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I am a new supervisor who is replacing another leadership staff member who retired. Employees had a great deal of respect for my predecessor. How do I efficiently and quickly gain their trust? I know that this also is the first step toward gaining a great deal of respect in the future.**

Understanding the meaning of trust can help you practice behaviors and set standards for yourself that will win the hearts and minds of your employees. Trust means reliance on and confidence in the truth, worth, and reliability of a person. Consider how these values translate into supervisory practice, and you'll gain trust. Every new supervisor has the battle half won when it comes to gaining trust. This is because employees want to be led by someone they trust. To get on the fast track, establish relationships with your employees that demonstrate you can be counted on for support when the going gets tough. When times are tough, your employees will have faith in your ability to support them. This will deepen their trust in you. Be a consistent communicator, along with making yourself accessible. This will remove the mystery between you and your employees, a frequently overlooked obstacle to building trust. Be truthful with employees. Doing so will build their confidence in you. Keep commitments and appointments and only promise what you are certain you can deliver. This will show employees that you are reliable.

■ **Is there a method or approach to inspiring employees? When I think of employees being inspired, I think of them as motivated. Are feeling inspired and feeling motivated the same thing?**

All inspired employees are motivated, but not all motivated employees necessarily feel inspired. Often, the two terms are used interchangeably, but a closer look reveals important differences. An employee can be motivated to accomplish work as a result of being provoked, aggravated, goaded, or annoyed into productivity. On the other hand, employees who feel inspired are moved internally, feel enthused about work accomplishments and are infectious in their excitement. Here's the formula: To inspire employees, summarize a tantalizing goal, discuss its implications for everyone, remind workers of their past triumphs, and ask them to reflect on what drove them to achieve successful outcomes in the past. Help set their sights on a faraway goal that's so exciting and potentially rewarding that they can't help but covet it. Finally, help them visualize what it will feel like to reach the mountaintop.

■ **What's the difference between stress and pressure? Sometimes I think employees feel pressure at work, but not unmanageable**

Stress, pressure, force, strain, and distress are terms frequently used in mental-health and workforce-management literature to define different work-generated tensions and the degrees of severity faced by employees. These definitions are rather fluid among authors. Every employee experiences these work tensions differently and managing them is a

stress. Employees should seek support from the EAP, but not for the “normal” sense of urgency that everyone feels to get things done, correct?

learned skill. Encourage your employees to use the EAP for any perceived personal need, even if you judge the degree of work stress they face to be much less than what they perceive it to be. As employees adapt to stress, they tend to naturally elevate their tolerance level for it. It’s better for the EAP to work with employees early-on when severe stress or strain have not yet taken their toll on mental health and productivity. The EAP will sort out what help may or may not be required.

■ Do economic downturns affect employee safety and wellness? Can the EAP play a role in helping employees reduce injuries?

During periods of economic downturn, employers naturally place constraints on resources. Employees may be reassigned, layoffs occur, new hires are delayed, longer hours are worked, and taking over a coworker’s assignments may happen more often. This added stress increases the risk of employee injuries from worry and anxiety about the future of their positions, job security, or roles in the company. Increasing communication between you and your employees can help. Keep the information flowing. According to Gallup, 30% of workers worry about their job security and even more about benefits. This is double the number of employees who worried about such issues in 2008. Encourage employees to use EAP resources and consider opportunities for the EAP to help your employees manage stress and anxiety. Source: <http://tiny.cc/job-worry>

■ Certainly all supervisors eventually face the task of managing difficult employees. Beyond a magazine article or short seminar, though, I haven’t seen much in-depth training. Is the EAP a good resource for this kind of help? What about experienced peers?

Both sources of experience — the EAP and your peers — can lend guidance to managing difficult employees. Obviously, the EAP has advantages your professional friends do not possess. One is confidentiality. Your peers may not keep conversations confidential. The EAP can also help you discover how your personality style supports or interferes with the process of managing difficult employees. It can challenge and help you to use new or different approaches. Role plays are very effective tools, and the EAP may suggest them. Admittedly, learning to respond properly to distressed, upset, or difficult employees is a “learning by doing” experience, but there are also principles worth knowing. Remaining calm, thinking deliberately before you speak, avoiding emotional involvement, practicing detachment, reducing provocative responses, and knowing how to problem-solve are only a few principles you can learn from the EAP.

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