

FrontLine Leader

Employees — Your most valuable asset

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This information is provided by Continuum EAP. If you would like more information on these or other topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Q: Regarding supervisor behavior, what does the phrase “silo mentality” mean? Can EAPs play a role in helping supervisors overcome this practice?

The phrase “silo mentality” is more applicable to the dysfunctional practice of departments within organizations isolating themselves by being concerned only with their unique purpose. Withholding information, competitiveness, communication breakdowns, and, when severe enough, nearly isolated work environments can result. Supervisors can unwittingly practice a similar behavior by isolating themselves, withholding information, failing to engage with workers, and focusing more on charts and metrics than developing their people.

Avoiding this practice requires skills of engagement, collaboration, sharing information, coaching and modeling. New supervisors are especially at risk for isolating behavior if they give in to insecurities. Some may deny their role and hope the work unit can function without their direction by deferring to one or two strong subordinates. It may feel safer, but it is a recipe for disaster. The employee assistance program is an ideal source of help. Beyond coaching, Continuum EAP can confidentially assess personal issues and help the supervisor identify and overcome roadblocks to full engagement.

Q: I have always understood humor in the workplace to be a good thing. Recently, I heard that this is not necessarily true. Can you explain this with respect to supervisors who do a lot of kidding around?

A: **There is a difference** between employees expressing humor within a psychologically safe workplace and the supervisor over-employing humor as a way to interact and manage employees. Some humor may contribute to an intimidating and offensive work environment and make supervisors seem less approachable. Overused, humor can also send a message that there is nothing very serious about what we do here — that mistakes and problems are not to be taken seriously. This results in the loss of a healthy sense of urgency and leads to diminished performance by employees. This dynamic can prompt employees to focus on personal matters rather than workplace productivity. However, humor is a natural human behavior. It is not something that has to be deliberately learned or practiced. Naturally occurring, it can be an indicator of a positive work climate where employees are able to be happy, healthy and productive. Learn more at <https://wustl.edu> (search “humor in the workplace”).

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Q: I want to refer an employee to Continuum, but I don't have much hope things will change. He lies, manipulates, and tells people what he thinks they want to hear. The EAP is likely to be putty in his hands. Is this a big problem for EAPs — dishonest employees?

Yes, sometimes employees come to Continuum and lie. They may attempt to manipulate the EAP professional and control the direction of the conversation, and behave as though they are insightful and fully cooperative, but they are not. Other times, employees truly do not perceive the situation the same way as the company or get stuck in their idea of how things “should be.” The truth is, the most important part of an EAP referral is helping the employee be successful in the workplace and make the needed behavioral changes. With this in mind, it is important for the company to provide as much clarity related to the specific performance concerns and the changes necessary for the employee to be successful.

The EAP is here to help the employee better understand those expectations and work through any barriers impeding them from making changes. Sometimes employees aren't willing or able to make the behavioral changes required. In those instances, the company can feel encouraged that they offered resources to help the employee prior to moving forward with corrective action.

I have been offered a manager position within my company, but I don't know if I have the leadership skills to do it. I don't mind a challenge, but isn't leadership a natural aptitude sort of thing? Can Continuum help with my decision?

It is a myth that leadership can't be learned. Here are a few rewarding challenges to master — all teachable:

- Thinking and acting in ways that encourage others so they trust and follow you.
- Creating a vision or a direction in which you want to lead a team.
- Having a personal vision for yourself within this context.
- Considering crises that can happen and how to respond to them.
- Being optimistic (optimistic authority figures inspire others).
- Resolving conflicts.
- Taking charge before being told what to do.
- Pulling others into the action.
- Striving for excellence, not perfection.
- Maintaining high standards and giving others credit where it is due.
- Praising employees frequently to inspire them to produce.
- Taking risks out of your comfort zone.
- Being truthful to yourself.
- Knowing your strengths and weaknesses, and depending on others with skills you lack to achieve work-unit goals.
- Building your brand as a leading expert in one or two areas.
- Being a credible resource others trust.
- Being a role-model for compassion, commitment, effort, integrity, teamwork, good communication and vision.
- And working as hard as the rest of your team!

Feeling insecure about any of these? Talk to a Continuum EAP professional and troubleshoot hurdles throughout your career.