

FrontLine Supervisor

Employees — Your most valuable asset

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November 2017

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In case you missed it

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: I was hired to replace a supervisor who left the organization. There is a history of conflict, and I need to earn trust. I can tell this won't be easy due to past experiences. How do I get employees to trust me? Is there any role for Continuum in helping me?

Although your employees had experiences with the prior supervisor that created a sense of distrust, it is human nature to trust another person over fearing them. For now, their distrust is about self-preservation, but you have their natural urge to trust on your side. Allow trust and approachability to naturally emerge by practicing several behaviors recommended for any supervisor. Do not allow the sense of distrust to cause you to avoid your employees. Engage with them and share "small" but personal things about yourself. This demonstrates you are initiating trust with them, which is naturally reciprocal. Beyond personal engagement, demonstrate trust in other ways by backing and supporting your employees. Take chances with their abilities and capabilities. Some of your employees may resist trusting you longer than others. Resistance from some individuals due to past experiences and personal issues may occur. Continuum can consult with you on these issues to help you build the winning team you want.

Q: Sexual harassment prevention has been in the news lately. But I do not hear much about other types of harassment. What other sorts of issues associated with harassment and unwanted behavior should supervisors be aware of so we can confront these issues early?

A: **Behavior that is** intimidating, hostile or offensive to reasonable people is considered harassment. Characteristically, it is unwanted. So, notice and do not tolerate unwelcome or offensive conduct. Harassment can be illegal when it is based on sex (including sexual orientation, pregnancy and gender identity), race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability and/or even genetic information. Do you see behavior that can be considered detrimental to an employee's work performance, professional advancement and/or mental health? Examples include offensive jokes, epithets or name-calling, undue attention, physical assaults or threats, unwelcome touching/contact, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, constant or unwelcome questions about an individual's identity, and offensive objects or pictures. Consult with your manager and/or HR adviser for clarification on matters concerning harassment. Referring employees who participate in these behaviors to Continuum EAP, and documenting corrective actions, are crucial.

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Q: I am on a mission to get my employees more engaged. If I do this right, what are the top benefits I am likely to see? Also, can Continuum help me with this project? It's not about counseling employees, but perhaps the EAP's "people knowledge" can assist me.

Yes, talk with Continuum EAP. You will find many research reports and analytical data on this topic to guide you. You can anticipate that the most significant return on your investment of energy with this project will be employees who are willing to do more than expected, are more productive, and get along better with each other. You may see improvement in attendance, fewer sick days, and higher morale.

Hint: Research shows that you will make a big impact by listening to their opinions, being clear in what you ask and expect from them, and recognizing their contributions both privately and in front of peers.

Q: I oversee EMTs and firefighters. Many of them deny being under stress. Is it a waste of time to have them attend a stress management class? I inquired, but most of them seemed to indicate no interest in a class or were noncommittal.

It seems there are two issues common among these employees where a duty to serve requires a selfless commitment to others and a willingness to place others' well-being ahead of their own.

It's this: Recognizing stress and acknowledging it. With Continuum's help, educate employees about stress. Include what stress is, how it works, how it harms, how to manage it, and symptoms associated with ongoing stress when it is ignored and the physiologic response of the body when it becomes chronic. They will mostly likely listen despite how it appears. Even if they do not, you've done the right thing.

STRESS RELIEF

Are you familiar with the "four A's" of stress management? This memory jogger is a great way to help remember coping strategies when you're faced with stressful situations.

Interested in learning more? Read this entire Continuum EAP blog feature at 4continuum.com — Search: "Four A's of Stress Management."

