

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



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.

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## Continuum's Management Skill Development Coaching Service

Most organizations agree that effective leadership is linked to organizational success and support the idea of developing managers and supervisors. More difficult for organizations to determine is **what** resources are most effective in accomplishing this goal — conferences, mentoring, training, “trial by fire”? Because leadership development is rarely a “one size fits all” issue, Continuum offers “**Management Skill Development Coaching**”. The individualized coaching provided by experienced Workplace Consultants at Continuum focuses on helping supervisors and managers develop in the areas of 1) interpersonal communication, 2) coaching and motivating employees, 3) effectively managing conflict and 4) learning about and leading from their own strengths. Please contact us if you would like to learn more about this valuable service. For more information on this service, you can contact your Consultant at 402/476-0186 or 800/755-7636 or email us at EAspecialist@4continuum.com.

### ■ What is a “blame culture” as it applies to business and work settings?

A “blame culture” exists when fear and blame are used to manage productivity issues resulting from problems and mistakes experienced by employees. In the book, *Stop the Blame Culture* (Gower Publishing Company, 1998), authors describe how a blame culture sabotages productivity by causing employees to seek conformity rather than opportunities that requires risk. Evading accountability and responsibility, and being able to quickly gather data to prove innocence becomes the corporate mindset. Reduced communication, reduced innovation, and inhibited entrepreneurial thinking result. Businesses can move away from a blame culture by changing the corporate mindset to establish new traditions that value learning and appreciation for mistakes as opportunities for improving productivity and innovation. This improves morale, increases energy, promotes positivity, and facilitates the achievement of ambitious goals.

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■ **I have been a supervisor for 27 years. I recently hired an employee who acts like he knows more than I do about my job. This employee does have some good ideas, but, frankly, I am put off by the “hotshot” attitude. Maybe I am old-fashioned or insecure?**

**You have a bright** and precocious employee, but there appears to room for the presence of an ambitious and assertive newcomer on your staff, but improvements in the communication style so there will be more receptivity by others for ideas and suggestions. Your concern about whether this problem lies with you indicates that you have already made attempts to be open-minded and tolerant. Certainly it can be a challenge adapting to the presence of an ambitious and assertive newcomer on your staff, but you appear to have a valid concern with the employee’s style. Consider meeting with the EAP for a short consult to gain a clearer picture of what part of this issue lies with you and where you might start in helping this employee gain maturity in communication. Effective communication at work is an acquired skill, and improvements come from supportive

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■ **My custodian is a diligent worker, but over the past couple of months, this person has mentioned to a few employees concerns about being followed by “foreign government agents” who tap the phone at work. I know the employee is distressed. Should I make a referral? How?**

**You should discuss** this situation with your manager and a HR or other adviser. An EAP referral is appropriate, but be prepared to require a fitness for duty examination. Your employee appears to trust you enough to share these concerns, which can be helpful in convincing the person to seek support. Recommend that the individual schedule an EAP visit. Assure the employee that the EAP is the correct source of guidance. If you are not successful, arrange a fitness for duty examination in consultation with your management advisers. The EAP can also play a consultative role in this regard. Discussing beliefs that are obviously of a delusional nature are distressing to coworkers, but mental illnesses that include delusions are not uncommon. An evaluation is appropriate to rule out other risks or issues and to assist the employee in obtaining any necessary treatment.

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■ **My employee is very “slippery.” When I confront this person about performance issues, there is always an excuse, another angle, or some little truth in the rebuttal that causes me to back down. Either I am not assertive enough, not as smart, or too easily swayed. How do I win this game?**

**It isn’t necessary** to outsmart your employee. Don’t focus on quality of work or technical aspects of the job yet, but the attitude demonstrated by the employee in response to confrontations or corrective interviews you conduct with the person. What you need from your employee is cooperation with your role. This means responding to your confrontations with a sincere desire to discover what is important to you and not to do battle in an effort to dodge whatever point you are trying to make. Until this mindset of your employee changes, other issues of a more practical nature will fail to be corrected. There may be some need for you to be more assertive, but it is much more likely that the missing piece here is to help your employee see that his or her perspective prompts an inappropriate response that interferes with productivity.