

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

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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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Consulting

Climate/Employee Satisfaction Surveys

One of the best tools an organization can use to determine the corporate culture is to ask the people who work within the organization about their satisfaction. Continuum can assist you by facilitating the climate survey process. Although information gathering is very important, figuring out what to do with the feedback is paramount to an organization's success. Our Climate Survey services include working with the organization from beginning to end to assure that the information is utilized. These projects do have additional fees but our member companies receive generous discounts. Contact us today to discuss your needs and we'll provide you with detailed proposal.

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■ **How can supervisors be more effective in managing workplace conflicts, especially those that could become violent? We aren't psychologists or trained mediators, so other than disciplining employees, what easy, practical, and effective early-stage steps are there?**

It is a misconception that you must have special training before you can be successful at the simplest and often most effective conflict resolution strategies. Your most important tools are your eyes and ears. An active and involved supervisor will detect the beginning throes of conflict. When this happens, share your observations and remind employees in a firm manner about the company's expectations for appropriate conduct. This is your first step at intervention. It communicates to the employees that they have the responsibility to change their behavior and resolve the conflict. And it prompts a sense of urgency to do so faster. By contrast, jumping in to reconcile differences often sends an unspoken message that the unwanted behavior can continue until a solution to the conflict is discovered. Speaking up as described above is a simple idea. It's the art of being "firm." It is often overlooked or never learned by some supervisors. In many situations, it is your most powerful tool for correcting behavior.

■ **The employee assistance program referred my employee only to alcohol education following a positive drug test. Apparently, EAP didn't think *alcoholism treatment* was needed. Should the EAP have interviewed me? I have heard many stories about the employee's drinking practices.**

The employee assistance professional relies upon research-based interviewing tools to make a recommendation and an appropriate referral. Your documentation related to performance on the job may be relevant, but information you possess about the employee's drinking experiences gathered from hearsay could not be relied upon in an assessment. As part of an educational course, your employee's problem will be considered closely to ensure that he or she is receiving the proper level of care. Sometimes employees in alcohol education are referred to treatment. The assessment of your employee is more than a few questions of self-reported drinking practices. Questions overlap, and many areas of lifestyle are explored related to alcohol consumption and problems associated with drinking. Most alcoholic employees are unable to evade a positive diagnosis if one is called for.

■ **Can you provide guidance on communicating bad news to employees and how supervisors should handle themselves to reduce anxiety among workers when plant closings, layoffs, or cuts in benefits occur? Are there any techniques or tricks that experienced supervisors recommend?**

Upsetting and bad news is often preceded by guidance to supervisors from management about how to disclose it. When these guidelines or instructions are ignored, larger problems occur. Distress on the part of employees stems from how supervisors personally feel about the news. A supervisor's anxiety can cause errors in communication. Supervisors may feel guilty for passing along the bad news or fear employee reactions to it. This can lead to misstatements, rumors, more anxiety, false hopes that later fuel bigger resentments, and conceivably workplace violence. The employee assistance program is an excellent resource for allowing supervisors to discuss and process their own anxiety. When it comes to bad news, there are no tricks, but there are watchwords. They are "open," "honest," "clear," and "timely." Follow the instructions, and if there aren't any, work with other managers so there is consistency in communication.

■ **Everyone knows what enabling is, but I believe stressed-out supervisors are especially vulnerable to participating in enabling behaviors. What are some of these enabling patterns facilitated by supervisor stress?**

The desire to reduce stress can lead to avoidance of confrontation. This makes it easy to react to troubled employees by enabling them. Most supervisors don't realize this connection. Unfortunately, enabling keeps a troubled employee on the path toward larger problems, so supervisors who enable can expect serious crises down the road. Typical enabling patterns include: 1) downplaying inappropriate behavior by employees, 2) denying or ignoring red flags that may be signs of trouble, 3) being too agreeable and not making waves with a troubled employee, 4) minimizing a troubled employee's condition when talking to the boss, 5) giving extra leeway or special treatment to a troubled employee, and 6) when a troubled employee opens up to you, jumping in to give reassurance that "everything's OK" or "you'll be just fine."