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FrontLine Leader

Employees — Your most valuable asset

What's the most significant problem in the workplace that inhibits productivity, causes conflicts between workers and managers, and creates the most risk for employees and the organization?



A: The answer is poor workplace communication. Because nothing happens without communication, and because every dimension of an organization's mission depends on communication, it will always be the single most important influencer of productivity or lack of it. We are not talking about just sending and receiving messages. There is no end to getting communication right,

but here's a hint: Think "barriers." There are many types of barriers that affect every possible type of workplace communication. For an example of how veiled these barriers can be in one area alone, consider new hires. Upon hiring new workers, you should always provide a performance plan that describes the most important duties in detail and how they

should be completed. It sounds simple, but EAPs commonly receive this surprisingly common complaint from employees: "I don't know what they want me to do." Or, "No one has given me a job description." Imagine the conflict, misunderstanding, frustration and productivity issues that this communication barrier creates.



Many supervisors don't appreciate the value of performance reviews in developing workers. Many view the process as a chore, which leads to it being postponed or delayed. What can help supervisors feel excited or feel more urgency about completing them?

A: All employees have unique gifts and skills waiting to be discovered. Much of this is a lifelong process of discovery, and supervisors are in a unique position to spot these abilities and encourage and develop them. Reviews offer these opportunities, and employees are cheated without an effective relationship with the supervisor that helps discover their true potential. Many employees will not spot how much they have learned,

be able to articulate their skills, or grow in confidence without feedback. The payoff for the company is having employees who desire to take more initiative, along with increased willingness to take risks, including bringing forth their own great ideas to solve problems. In addition, review time invariably brings up the topic of roadblocks, which can often be personal. Continuum EAP can then be a resource for problem resolution.



Is it OK for supervisors to discuss psychological techniques for feeling better when employees are having a bad day, or offer employees tips on coping with stress? What about sadness over a relationship breakup? Sometimes referring them to the EAP does not feel like the right response.

A: Conversations with employees may broach personal challenges faced at work and at home, relationships issues or internal personal struggles. Offering practical tips for coping with stress that you have personally found useful, or demonstrating empathy along with suggesting stress-relieving ideas, does not interfere with your role as a manager or

cross boundaries that would impede your employee seeking help with a personal problem at the EAP. Suggesting employees take a break, calm down, look at things a different way, or check out a book you have found helpful is not what's referred to by those who suggest supervisors should "avoid diagnosing or counseling workers." However, you should promote

Continuum EAP as a supportive and problem-solving resource and refrain from promoting your suggestions as ultimate solutions. Also, avoid ongoing advising on personal problems. Never hesitate to contact Continuum with a question about your role and what's appropriate, and for guidance on what to say or do next with an employee's concern.



Can I refer an employee to the EAP for being too much of a perfectionist? He turns projects in late. I will admit they are of high quality, and in fact are better than most, but they are not worth the delays. He calls himself a perfectionist, but I think it's an excuse.

A: Employees who claim to be perfectionists have an "advantage": Who can blame them for wanting to be perfect? This reaction offers the clue to their motivation. Typically, the main motivation is avoiding criticism. Perfectionist employees may spend inordinate amounts of time tweaking the last 10% of a project, thus causing delays in delivery. Not all are motivated by the same goals, so avoid diagnosing them. Telling your employee that "done is better than perfect" may allow the worker to make the necessary behavioral shift.

In practical terms, there are no true perfectionists who live up to their view of what they would like to achieve. Refer your employee to the EAP based upon performance issues, not perfectionism. (You may discover that this is an easily correctable behavior.) Continuum's trained professionals can help your employee identify what is ultimately causing the performance concerns. For example, fear of criticism may be a driver, but the real problem may be fear of vulnerability in work and personal relationships.