

FEBRUARY
2021

FrontLine Leader

Employees — Your most valuable asset

Periodically, I see articles about empathy and supervisors. The dictionary defines empathy as the “ability to understand and share the feelings of another.” Why is this so important?



A: Empathy in the workplace has wide application for supervisors. A simple example would be recognizing an employee is experiencing grief and offering a supportive response. A complex example would be listening to an employee's complaints but suspending your judgment and not labeling the worker as

disgruntled, but instead focusing on understanding, discovering a solution, and implementing it to benefit others. When you spend time observing behaviors of employees and engaging with them, you begin to identify their feeling states. Over time, you develop a skill called “empathic reach” or “accurate empathy.”

You're not a mind reader, but you are able to detect with higher frequency and accuracy, issues and concerns affecting your employees. You are also perceived by employees as a safe person to approach with problems and concerns. For these reasons, empathic supervisors build strong loyalty among their employees.



I formally referred my employee to Continuum EAP, and the employee was very cooperative. The next day, I discovered he checked into a psychiatric unit for acute depression, but did not go through the EAP. I am surprised, but happy he got help. Should Continuum remain involved in some way?

A: Since you have coordinated with Continuum in the process of making a management referral, it would be appropriate to let us know that the situation has changed and that your employee is currently receiving medical care. As he is preparing to return to work, you can still refer the employee to Continuum as a part of his return to work plan.

The EAP can assist with helping the employee during this transition and make sure that there are strategies in place to address the performance concerns that precipitated the initial management referral.



I don't visually observe my employees often, since many of them are working remotely. I would like to keep an eye open for signs of stress, but how is this done without seeing interpersonal behaviors or attitude problems?

A: Several research studies that track employee mental health have shown that the pandemic has taken a toll. What's tricky is helping managers support the mental health of employees without stepping into a diagnostic role. Increasing communication with workers is a good idea because this can naturally lead to more discovery about

how your employees are doing generally. Another tip is to be appropriately open about, or at least acknowledge your own feelings of, stress during this COVID-19 era. This "disclosure begets disclosure" idea can prompt your employees to share their own stress issues. You can then remind or encourage use of Continuum EAP services.

Note that when an employee shares something personal with you as a manager, the degree to which they demonstrate anxiety or concern is usually minimized. Understanding this can keep you from also minimizing the importance of an issue that could greatly benefit from EAP assistance.

Continuum is here to help – Call us for a consultation!

Did you know that members of management and HR receive unlimited, confidential consultations with Continuum EAP to discuss sensitive workplace issues and concerns?

Our workplace consultants are skilled in a variety of areas including substance use, low productivity, co-worker conflict, unprofessional/disruptive behavior and domestic violence. The Continuum consultant will collaborate with you to help you develop a plan of action to address the situation that is in line with your company policies and internal systems.

However, consultations may not always lead to specific interventions. In some cases, our consultants can help best by being a supportive sounding board when you are struggling with next steps.

For example, you may have questions related to COVID-19. We are equipped with ideas and resources to help you manage this and many other complex situations that we are faced with today. Our consultants are trained to help you sort through your concerns and clarify your goals, as well as point you in the right direction if you would benefit from referrals to additional services or information.