

The Frontline Supervisor

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Q. I documented my employee's performance issues and came back the next day to look at what I had written. I have to admit that the emotions really came through in the wording. I am glad I let it "cool down" overnight. Is it a good idea to let documentation sit for a day or two?

A. If you are not in a rush, it is an excellent idea. The relationship with your employee can be stressful, so your emotions can come through in your documentation. It is easier to spot problems with your documentation the next day. Remove your documentation's emotional content so it does not undermine your goal. For example, eliminate diagnostic judgments like "he is passive aggressive" or "she acts depressed," and remove character labels like "lazy," "inconsiderate," "immature," etc. These phrases undermine documentation. You are documenting for the employee's benefit, but be clear with details and facts so if management needs to act on the documentation, they clearly can follow it. Do not discuss the intrapsychic reasons your employee behaves the way he or she does. Focus on when, who, where, how, why, etc. Your HR advisor and/or EAP can also consult with you on documentation.

Q. What is a fear-based workplace? Do I work within one, and how can I make a difference to improve the work environment for my employees?

A. A fear-based workplace is one marked by significant anxiety, insecurity, and trepidation by employees whose productivity is a result of motivation driven by fear, rather than what they might gain or achieve. Fear-based workplaces are usually characterized by toxic relationships that flourish, with drama, infighting, turf wars, and warring over resources, money, or power. Most workplaces don't remain fear-based very long before a crisis erupts and opportunity for change appears. At the supervisory level, you can prevent the birth of a fear-based workplace by 1) encouraging work-life balance; 2) keeping open communication among employees to help shut down rumors; 3) encouraging collaboration among employees; 4) not making everyone only "live by the numbers," but also recognizing humanistic and intangible forms of success; 5) encouraging information sharing and decision making; and 6) communicating with the ranks. Don't make decisions mysteriously in unexplained closed-door meetings.

Q. My employee misses a lot of work. There are rumors he has a compulsive gambling problem, but I have no direct knowledge of this. When I make a supervisory referral for absenteeism, should I mention the possible gambling? I am worried the employee won't be truthful and the EAP will be fooled.

A. There are two paths to resolution. One is your employee shares the nature of his gambling problem if it exists, so proper assessment and referral to effective help can be made by the EAP. The other is he does not share the reason for his attendance problem, which will eventually force the organization to dismiss the worker if the problem becomes intolerable. If the latter

occurs, another offer of EAP assistance may produce strong motivation because of the threat to job security. More employees would be salvaged if this principle were understood by business organizations. Denial is strong with certain problems like addictive diseases such as gambling. However, employees in crisis will avail themselves of help. In a phone consult, tell the EAP what you have heard about the gambling. The EAP will keep this information in mind when conducting the assessment, using the information as appropriate.

Q. I successfully referred my employee to the EAP. Why is it necessary that I remain in communication with the EAP? The employee is following through nicely, so I think my job is done. If problems return, I will decide what next to do with the employee.

A. Employees who sign releases to allow the EA professional to communicate with the supervisor about their participation in the program, and cooperation with recommendations, are at an advantage for remaining motivated to follow through and get well. Without this communication, employees are more likely to reduce their personal investment in recovery when they begin to improve, feel better, do well on the job, etc. The dynamic is not unlike forgetting to take an antibiotic once the symptoms of the infection have passed. The sense of urgency dissipates. Communication with you helps maintain this healthy sense of urgency. This is especially true with supervisor referrals because of serious infractions. Typically, when relapses occur, symptoms do not immediately appear at work. These are delayed while other parts of the employee's personal life fracture. Performance decline comes later. Communication with you about the employee's participation alerts you to the possibility of relapse, and this in turn alerts you to be more observant.

Q. What does the research say about giving employees breaks during the day? We are so busy, frankly, that I don't encourage people to take breaks. I don't stand in anyone's way, but I assume not encouraging them to take breaks sends a nonverbal negative message.

A. New research on taking breaks at work was recently conducted by Baylor University. The findings were the first of their kind, focusing on why work breaks are valuable, what time to take breaks, the best type of work break to take, what to do during a work break, and the physical and mental health benefits of taking breaks. Key findings include that it is better to take a work break mid-morning, before fatigue is experienced. This replenishes resources—energy, concentration, and motivation—more successfully than breaks taken at any other time of day. The later a break comes in the day, the less effective it will be. The best breaks are the ones where employees do something they enjoy, and this could be work-related! There is no evidence that nonwork-related activities are more beneficial. Better breaks produce better mental health and increased job satisfaction. Now you have reasons to encourage taking breaks. Source: www.baylor.edu [Search: 159785]

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