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Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor

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■ **I want to hire employees with good skills, but passion is something I value even more. How do I spot passion in a potential new hire?**

**If employers could** hang a sign outside their workplaces that said, “Passion Wanted, Inquire Within” and make it work, they’d do it. Passion is the engine of highly productive employees. These employees can learn to accomplish almost anything. They’re drivers. You can ask employees to talk about products or services of your company, and you can see their enthusiasm. However, passion is evidenced by behaviors, outcomes, and productivity. It comes later—or doesn’t come at all. If you are personally passionate about your work, you will guess which employees are likely to be passionate also. This is because their values match your own. Spend time exploring work values during interviews, and discuss your company’s products or services along with their meaning to the employee. Does the employee see his or her life’s purpose as a chosen occupation, and is that aligned with the mission and goals of your organization? There is a saying: “You can buy merit, but you can’t buy passion.” However, you can get pretty close.

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■ **My employee tends to be stubborn and unable to see others’ points of view. She is too blunt; for example, she’ll say, “You’re wrong!” rather than “I believe that...” She talks down to others. I correct her, but any changes don’t last. I think she is insecure. Would counseling help?**

**Your employee has a** habit of communicating with others that is difficult to change, but it’s doable. There could be many reasons for her communication style, but your focus should be on correcting it, not guessing its cause. You need more leverage than simply fussing at her in return for short-term corrections. Consider holding her accountable by incorporating change in her performance reviews. Meet several times during the year to reinforce progress. Using this planned approach is important. Other leverage may include a corrective letter to create an impression and provide motivation for change. A supervisor referral to the EAP is also appropriate; EAP sessions would help her improve faster, would reinforce progress, and would make those changes last.

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■ **We have a diverse workforce, and there is tension among some groups of employees that I think is race-based. I dealt swiftly**

**Visit with the EAP to** discuss your observations and the history of problems that are occurring within your work unit. There are many ways to approach diversity issues and inappropriate race-related remarks that surface between groups. Context and history are important. Not every problem requires a training or seminar solution. Sometimes the best

**with a racially inappropriate remark recently. Should I have the EAP in to do diversity awareness training, or will this make things worse?**

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**■ I had a meeting to discuss my employee's tardiness. She said personal issues with her husband were to blame, but she was getting counseling. I decided against a supervisor referral at that point. She's doing great now, but should I have referred her to the EAP?**

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**■ My employee has offered pretty lame excuses for failing to complete three training courses this year. I wrote a disciplinary letter and let him read it, with the idea of placing it in his file if he received another "incomplete." It worked! Was this better than an EAP referral?**

intervention is a direct, zero-tolerance approach by management to address inappropriate behavior exhibited by certain employees. Sometimes EAPs have chosen to facilitate small, representative committees of employees who discuss options and select an approach that seems best for the whole group. This is a particularly powerful strategy that can produce a healing effect. Sometimes the best approach is a workshop on issues of respect, tolerance, and treating others appropriately. This sends a broader message that covers other employees who feel disrespected. Hold employees with inappropriate behavior accountable, and act quickly to discourage anything less than a respectful workplace.

**You could have** made a supervisor referral, even though your employee had other plans. Regardless, your employee's tardiness has stopped. That means your corrective interview with her was successful. EAP referral is not a required way to solve a personal problem. It's not a replacement for community resources that employees may wish to use. Your employee had a plan for correcting her tardiness—getting counseling with her husband. Hopefully, the issue of her tardiness has been resolved. From the organization's viewpoint, that's the bottom line. If your employee starts coming to work late again, then you should pick up your discussion where you left off and make the supervisor referral, even if your employee claims to have another plan. This time your employee will have the EAP advantage—a professional with an accurate understanding of the employment issues, an impartial assessment of the right intervention, motivational counseling, appropriate communication with you, and follow-up.

**The purpose of a** supervisor referral is to help an employee improve performance when you are unable to make those corrections in the normal supervisor discourse. Your approach obviously created a strong sense of urgency, enough for your employee to overcome whatever contributed to his inability or unwillingness to complete training. No one knows what issues originally interfered with his ability to complete training, so we can't say for certain that your method was "better" than a referral. For now, however, the pattern has stopped. You can assume that you didn't need the EAP this time—at least not yet. The EAP is still available as a resource for him (or for you) should the problem continue.

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## NOTES