

Frontline Supervisor

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Winter 2012



Inspiring Your Workforce: Is Charisma Necessary?

Q. How can I be the kind of supervisor who inspires employees? I am not the charismatic type. What communication skills or abilities are necessary?

A. It is not necessary to be charismatic in order to inspire your employees. You can learn how to help them be energetic, vibrant, moved to produce, willing to engage, and anxious to demonstrate that they are reliable, trustworthy, and loyal. Does that sound like a tall order? Start first by modeling and being an inspired leader. Let your employees see your excitement. If you are full of energy, it will be much easier to have it rub off on them. Tell your employees about your vision, your hopes for the work unit, and what excites you about the future. Let them know what a great job they're doing. Tell them how important their contributions are to the mission. Point out their strengths when you see them. Remain attentive to your employees' needs and meet often enough to know what they are. Go to bat for your employees, and never leave them thinking that "he/she doesn't know how tough we've got it." Instead, actually spend some time performing your employees' jobs so you understand their challenges. Set high standards and serve your employees. In return, they will then serve the organization.

Communication Concerns: Can the EAP help?

Q. A lack of communication is a bit of a problem within my work division. I harp on people to share information more efficiently and frequently, but everyone invariably reverts back to their old habits. These are "people issues," so can the EAP help?

A. When communication is problematic and the flow of information is poor, search for barriers and intervene around them. Frequently, barriers are physical or rooted in inefficient communication channels, but that is only scratching the surface. Barriers to communication in organizations can arise from attitude problems, poor supervision, personality conflicts, language differences, culture clashes, personal problems, and more. This is where the EAP can provide an added layer of help and expertise. Consult with your EAP to see if you can discover potential behavioral or human-factor dimensions to this problem. EAP consultants are educated in communication dynamics, and have plenty of experience in understanding the role of sender and receiver, identifying tangible and intangible barriers, and intervening to improve communication.

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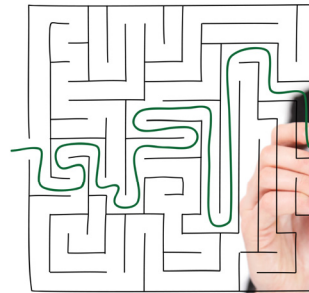
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Collaborative Leadership

Q. Is there an “attitude” about supervision that you recommend supervisors adopt? By attitude, I mean a framework or model that reduces distress in supervision relationships and makes them more collaborative.

A. Many supervisors visualize their role as “unidirectional,” or one way: the supervisor is “directing” and the employee is acting on that direction. This point of view is too simplistic: employees need you as much as you need them. Just as you seek job satisfaction and career advancement, so do your employees. This orientation to supervision will make your relationship with employees more cooperative and productive. Most supervisors want to guide employees, maximize their productivity, and help them develop and feel rewarded for the good work they do. But it is also important to see yourself as teaming up with your employee. Statements such as, “How can we cooperate with each other?” or “What do we need to work on to achieve results together?” demonstrate a proactive orientation to supervision. Supervisors with this orientation experience more cooperation from employees, less stress, and greater satisfaction in their work.



Navigating Workplace Culture

Q. Many new employees get into trouble because they don’t understand the work culture, the unwritten rules of communication, and the politics. Perhaps it’s not fair, but should I coach employees on these qualitative matters or let them sink or swim and figure it out?

A. Whether or not they are fair and productive, politics, power, and communication nuances in organizations are a reality. Over time, all organizations develop unwritten rules of the road for how employees must behave in order to fit in. Naturally, being out of touch or discovering these things the hard way can break an employee’s spirit. This makes it proper to orient your employees and coach them appropriately on the finer points of successfully navigating the work culture. Don’t wait for your employees to become confused or develop communication or performance problems. Instead, give some thought to what these political factors are, and make them part of your coaching discussions. This is helpful for employees, and benefits the work organization by synchronizing employee behavior with the organization’s culture.

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