

SOLUTIONS

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Question: I am determined to improve the level of respect employees show each other in our company. Beyond policies and work rules, what is a key strategy to positively influence change?

Answer: Maintaining a respectful workplace is a growing concern for businesses, but what many people do not realize is that much disrespect is not premeditated. Instead, it is reflective of a lack of self-control, education, fear and the influence of personal biases. Supporting a work culture where employees actively encourage respectful behavior toward each other by pointing it out as it happens is a powerful change strategy—just as important as confronting negative behaviors when they occur. Employees learn best through examples from leadership. Make it an every day focus because a respectful workplace is everyone’s responsibility. This approach will raise the level of awareness for preventing disrespectful behavior.

Question: I want to be a good leader, and I admire some of the supervisors in our organization because they are charismatic. Is this a learned leadership style? Can anyone become charismatic, or is a charismatic leader “born that way?”

Answer: Many studies have been done on charisma, but few have been able to pin down precisely what causes someone to have it. Most of us know someone who is charismatic or we know what it feels like when we meet such a person. It is clear that charismatic individuals possess a combination of powerful and

complex personality traits that produce a magnetic and unusual ability to charm or influence others. The debate is still on about whether charisma can be taught. More important than acquiring charisma is learning to lead others. That can be taught. The easiest way to begin is to study the differences between managers who are considered “leaders” and those who are not. You will discover that good leaders have skills that many charismatic persons are thought to possess, including the ability to inspire trust, be creative, see over the horizon, be unique, think in the long term, originate ideas and help their organizations reach the next level by constructively challenging the status quo.

Question: I was promoted from among my coworkers because I had the best work record. I don’t think I need supervisory courses. I think I am “a natural.” I know how to keep a crew of people in line. It is all common sense, right?

Answer: A history of successful interaction with coworkers may lead you to believe that you possess the full range of skills necessary to manage them. Common sense is a blend of skill, art, talent and experience. Once you are in a position of authority, your attitudes about supervision and leadership, beliefs on what motivates others and other personal issues will influence your decisions. Without training you may be less self-aware about how all of these factors come together to make you a more valued leader for your organization.



Question: If an employee had an alcohol problem, I think I would know it. That is why I am so surprised that one of my employees was admitted to the detox unit over the weekend. To my knowledge, this employee never drinks at work, and his performance is fine.

Answer: Many employees with severe alcohol problems may not drink on the job. Instead, they drink after work, on weekends, or in the mornings prior to work or they experience binges you will never witness. Family members do witness such events, however, and a crisis at home may have led to the admission of your employee in this case. Your employee could have perfectly acceptable performance at work, yet still have domestic problems caused by alcoholism. When your employee returns to work, respond with support. Continue to focus on his job performance.

Question: In my pursuit of being the best manager I can be, my biggest challenge has been seeing problems before they happen—identifying early trouble in the decisions made by those I supervise. Is this an art or a skill?

Answer: As you manage employees over time, you may feel uncertain about the course of action or solution offered by an employee. Your accumulated knowledge and experience are working for you, causing you to act. This is a skill. For most managers, these sensations may be so subtle as to be dismissed. So, the challenge is spotting them and acting earlier. Train yourself to gauge your level of certainty or uncertainty sooner, rather than learning from costly mistakes. Ask the following: How certain is my employee about what he or she is doing or proposing?

What do I need to do, say or ask in order to get past these feelings of uncertainty? Has this employee answered all of my questions or are the answers incomplete or skirted? Avoid accepting solutions to problems you know aren't viable with the idea of fixing problems later if they occur. You're mentoring your staff.

Question: There is obviously more to listening than being available and attentive to what employees say. I received a poor rating on my annual evaluation from the company. What are the key issues supervisors miss with regard to listening to their employees?

Answer: A key measure of success in how well you listen to your employees is how they feel about you, and themselves, once you have finished meeting with them. Consider the common behaviors of managers who gain the trust of employees who come in search of a listener. When listening, do you show that you welcome the employee? Do you offer a smile or demonstrate an appreciative attitude that your employee has brought issues to your attention? Do you avoid interruptions and splitting your listening time with completing other tasks? Do you actively listen to employees? (Some supervisors listen to employees like a radio—hearing, nodding, but never looking up as they busy themselves with other tasks.) Do you validate the legitimacy of your employee's viewpoint, even if you disagree with it? Do employees leave a meeting with you feeling important and valued? To become a good listener, see this responsibility as an essential function alongside things such as budgeting or strategic planning. Doing so will produce happier employees and greater returns.

Question: I referred an employee to the EAP, and she seemed perfectly happy to go. However, I have learned that she never went. I didn't ask why, because her performance is fine now, but what could I have done, if anything, to make the employee more likely to follow through on my referral?

Answer: Any of the following steps may encourage your employee to follow through with a referral to the EAP. All have been tried and all have worked. 1) Focus on job performance and the trust you have that the employee wants to continue to be a valued employee. 2) Reassure your employee that the program is confidential to the extent allowed by law. 3) Let your employee know that associates will not know. 4) Provide your employee with an EAP brochure and the phone number of the EAP. 5) To get the ball rolling, offer to let the employee call the EAP from the office. 6) Remind the employee that the EAP is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is pre-paid. Talk to your EAP if you have any questions or if you need more suggestions about a particular situation or employee.

Question: An employee seems unusually tired lately. She says she has trouble sleeping. Can an EAP referral help her or are sleeping problems more of a medical issue? I could simply recommend she speak with her doctor. There's nothing wrong with that, is there?

Answer: Your employee says she is not sleeping, but to say it is a "sleeping problem" with a medical solution is a diagnostic conclusion better left to the EAP, following an interview with your employee. Sleeping problems can be caused by many things. Suggesting that someone check with their health care provider sounds like a no-brainer.

However, in the workplace you must consider other factors and your role. This makes the EAP your best bet. For a simple case of insomnia, the EAP might probe to determine the cause and suggest practical steps that promote deep sleep. For more complex sleep issues—from anxiety disorders to nagging physical pain to disrupted circadian rhythm patterns—the EAP can provide a referral to the appropriate health care expert. The EAP will also distinguish between physiological and psychological factors that disturb sleep.

Question: Can the EAP help me consider my approach to confronting an employee with bad breath or someone who smells bad from what they eat or has some other habit or personal matter like body odor, so that I don't offend the employee?

Answer: The key roadblock to discussing an annoying personal habit or behavior with an employee is imagining how awkward you might feel when confronting the employee, along with the surprise on the employee's face when the issue is raised. Fortunately, most supervisors discover that this fear is overrated. Instead of acting offended and horrified, the employee is usually grateful and thankful the supervisor has raised the issue. Usually there is a business reason for requesting that an employee alter an annoying behavior or change a disagreeable habit. The key is being able to identify it, articulate it and link it to your request. The EAP can help with this process and add some role playing if you think it may be helpful. Generally, the business rationale is a requirement that the employee cooperate with the cultural standards of the workplace or is how behaviors or habits directly affect the business and productivity.



Question: A young worker I recently hired is energetic, inquisitive, accepts feedback and has great ideas. Unfortunately, my office manager doesn't like her and is making comments about quitting. I am afraid of losing my office manager (who has been with me for 26 years!) because I am dependent on her. How do I resolve this?

Answer: It appears that your long-time employee may feel somewhat displaced by the new employee and is talking about resignation to confirm her position with you. This is not an unusual workplace conflict, but its resolution will elude you until you take charge as the senior manager. After 26 years, you have naturally grown dependent on an office manager who may seem irreplaceable. Your fear of losing her represents leverage to control you, and she may be taking advantage of it. This dynamic probably did not emerge overnight. Consider whether you have reinforced this behavior by your reaction to similar comments in the past. The EAP can help you face the uncertain outcome of reasserting your authority and help you reassume the power you may have given away to your subordinate. The EAP can provide you with conflict resolution techniques to use in this and other workplace conflict situations.

Question: We have no financial way to provide rewards to employees as incentives. I don't think employees are motivated by money to improve productivity anyway. What else can be used?

Answer: Money is a motivator for many employees initially, but it is not a powerful motivator over the long term. When considering incentives, remember that people change their behavior when it clearly benefits them to do so, based on what they value most. Many things are valued in the workplace, but the three predominant things are power, status, and popularity. In the workplace, power gives an employee control and influence over others. Status means prestige or elevated rank, and popularity means being liked or approved of. Your task is to figure out how to bring these values into the incentive mix with opportunities, duties or job functions that match them. If you can provide employees with one or more of these three things, you will be providing powerful motivators to improve their productivity.

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call: **800.765.0770**

