

# Frontline Supervisor



■ **I tend to be wary of conflicts at work and avoid them. Of course, I know issues underlying conflicts don't simply go away and larger problems can result. Still, I tend to avoid conflict when I can. What might cause supervisors not to face conflicts? How can we change?**

**Sometimes avoiding** conflict is a good thing, but many people mistake managing conflict for ignoring it or shying away from it. This is called conflict mismanagement. Fear of anger or fear of feeling “connection” is often the culprit in mismanaging conflicts. Connection in this context means closeness or demands on you to be open, honest, and authentic as a partner in resolving conflicts. Supervisors may not be equally proficient in these relationship skills. For some people, genuineness feels risky, particularly if their personal histories include negative experiences with vulnerability. If you learned that conflict leads to violence or “bad things” happening, you may avoid it, deny it, or delay in resolving it. Altering your behavior to accommodate conflict can lead to even greater problems. EAPs are experts at helping people manage conflicts. Learn more from these professionals if mismanaging conflict is an ongoing issue for you.

■ **Many of my employees have financial problems. Do employee financial problems put companies at risk in any way? I think it would be extremely unlikely that any of my employees would steal, for example. So why should a company be especially concerned?**

**It is estimated** that 30 million employees face severe financial stress -- about 25% of the workforce. This figure is up nearly 300% from 30 years ago. The ways this stress affects employers are not readily visible, but they are substantial. The average employee with financial problems loses 20 work hours per month dealing with financial issues. Financial stress is also linked to an increased risk of accidents. Accidents increase workers' compensation costs, and other ripple effects exist. Personal health can be grossly affected by financial stress. Sleep disturbances, hypertension, and anxiety are just a few examples. Many financially stressed employees seek part-time work; others quit for better pay. These are obvious turnover costs. Added burdens on workforce management professionals include dealing with garnishments, bill collectors, spouses seeking child support payments, and more.

■ **What is the most powerful way that I can help employees feel valued?**

**Not feeling** appreciated is a key reason employees quit jobs. This makes employee recognition programs popular. What often gets overlooked, however, is how appreciation can be expressed directly by supervisors. Don't rely solely upon your organization to do all the “thanking.” Engage in this practice and develop it as a skill. Learn how to make it effective. What works better, having appreciation come from you or from peers?

Also learn how to personalize praise by making it detailed. This has more positive impact. Thanking employees isn't just good for them; it also reinforces behaviors you want repeated. Never hesitate to ask your employees how they like to be thanked, and do not minimize your role in praising an employee for a solid effort. Overdoing it is harder than you think. Often employees complain, "I never get a thank-you from my boss." Don't let that be you.

**How can I help employees be more effective in workplace communication, specifically choosing its proper form? Sending an email to a customer, for example, rather than making a phone call can ruin a sale. There are other kinds of communication gaffes that are even worse.**

**Start with any** guidance available in your organization, but seek agreement with your employees on proper communication protocols. These can vary depending on your work culture, service, or industry. Brainstorm the most important communication scenarios. Discuss the implications of proper and improper communication choices. Research what other companies are doing to solve their communication issues. Some companies establish elaborate policies to gain better control over this problem. You can find examples by searching for the phrase "routine workplace communication techniques and protocols." The increasing options and tools for communication have compounded the problem. The adage "information is not communication" describes the difficulty faced by employers. A telephone call, email, post, tweet, text, or face-to-face meeting can all say the same thing, but the wrong choice of any of them can lead to disaster. Add generational bias or differences in status, position, or culture and you can see how this problem can affect the bottom line.

**Helping employees feel satisfied with their jobs so turnover is low and helping them remain happy so they perform well are every employer's goals. Is there research that points to how that is most predictably accomplished?**

**Helping your** employees feel "empowered" boosts morale and increases the desire to be productive. That's the conclusion of a study by Scott Seibert, professor of management and organization at the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business, which examined more than 140 other management research studies related to the effect of empowerment.<sup>1</sup> In every industry, occupation, or geographic region, empowering employees produces higher morale and motivation for higher productivity. It holds true regardless of gender, job, or culture. Empowerment is a closely studied dynamic with significant psychological effects on workers and a clear impact on the bottom line. Recognizing or improving your employees' work status, giving them authority to acquire resources and effect change, authorizing them to make decisions, giving them delegation authority, etc. -- these controls relieve stress and free up creativity. Find these opportunities in your employees' positions and you'll discover the magic effect of empowerment on your bottom line

## NOTES



For assistance call 508-990-0777 or 800-327-2723

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