

# THE *Front-line Supervisor*

*Presented by your EAP dor and associates, inc.*

Helping you to manage your company's most valuable resource -- your employees.

November 1998

## **CASE 1. Subtle hostility in the workplace**

➤ **Q. My employee complains about feeling “disrespected” by a coworker. She describes her coworker’s “nasty” tone of voice, “condescending” non-verbal behavior, and other non-verbal “rudeness.” Clearly documenting her complaints has been difficult.**

**A.** Your employee is complaining of an offensive or hostile work environment that you may need to investigate and resolve. If you've had difficulty grasping details of the complaints so you can confront the other worker, try the following approach. Start by referring your distressed employee to the EAP for help with the negative effects of this behavior and guidance in documenting her complaints for your use in a possible confrontation or corrective interview with the aggressing employee. The uncivil behavior your employee describes is, unfortunately, common in work groups. It is aggravating to managers and detrimental to productivity. Admittedly, it can be difficult pin down because it is often subtle, passive and designed by the aggressor to be interpreted by the coworker. This makes it easy to deny to those who try to intervene. A key step in resolving such behavior is the supervisor insisting that it stop. Remember that you can also refer the other employee to the EAP for help with this sensitive work performance issue as well.

## **CASE 2. But he's always been a good employee...**

➤ **Q. My employee has 15 years of outstanding performance. His marital problems have recently affected his work. I gave him an outstanding evaluation to avoid making matters worse. Wasn't this the right thing to do, for now?**

**A.** It's tough not giving outstanding evaluations to high performers with long histories of success in an organization. Your employee's motivation to solve his marital problems could be adversely affected, however, if he believes the organization will turn a blind eye to his performance problems. Indeed, you may play a role in enabling his decision to postpone getting help. Although you have been made aware of his marital problems, it's unlikely that you are aware of their full scope, his contribution to them, or whether they are a symptom of something worse. Allowing sympathy to bolster performance evaluations is a hazard for supervisors. Often, it indicates the supervisor has accepted the employee's version of the personal problem, what caused it, and how long it will last. Allowing the employee to postpone improvements in performance can cause resentment and anger in the supervisor if these improvements are not realized. Such an attitude, although understandable, can change the employee's focus from solving a personal problem to the problematic relationship with the supervisor.

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