

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



This information is provided by Continuum EAP. If you would like more information on these or other topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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■ **Employees sometimes come to me with complaints about difficult coworkers, but too often it is late in the game, when the relationships have deteriorated. How can I encourage employees to deal with their issues sooner?**

Most problem relationships grow difficult because coworkers fail to sit down and hammer out differences early on. Here's a prevention strategy: 1) Have more frequent contact with your employees in a group setting where you can model appropriate communication, set a tone for cooperation, and allow employees to see you interacting with their peers. Over time, your style will establish a nonverbal, almost unconscious standard of communication that employees will emulate. 2) Have more one-on-one interactions with employees so you learn about emerging conflicts and can offer guidance sooner. 3) Increase employees' motivation to address their issues sooner. Disavow the "fix-it" role. Instead, explain that when interpersonal conflicts arise, the conflicts will not be dissected in order to establish who's to blame. Instead, conflicts will be resolved in the most expedient manner, and both parties could find that solution undesirable.

■ **I have an employee who is somewhat flirtatious in the office. There have been no complaints yet, and he's a great guy. Still, I think he is a little too forward at times. Others disagree. I've been quiet so far, but I am worried about it. How should I respond?**

Sexual harassment is not a problem when behavior in the workplace between the sexes is pleasant and friendly, and contrary to misinformation, even mildly flirtatious interactions are not sexual harassment as long as no reasonable person is offended. Still, you should express your discomfort with the frequency of this behavior or the degree to which it appears. Be specific when you speak with your employee. You're in charge, so it's your job to decide when to step in. Most employees will respond cooperatively and favorably to such informal "counseling" sessions. Communication is everything. You can't go wrong by being proactive, reminding all employees about the sexual harassment policy periodically, and personally mentioning your strong disapproval of sexual harassment. Employees will take their cues from the tone and expectations you set for the workplace.

■ **My employees procrastinate. Can you coach me as a supervisor in helping them get their work done on time? There must be things I can do to help them dispose of this habit. I know badgering, threatening, and cajoling won't work.**

Although we all procrastinate and everyone knows what procrastination is, resolving the procrastination problems that your employees face is not a one-solution-fits-all situation. There are many resources to help employees with this problem, but each employee's procrastination problem is unique. While one employee may be easily distracted, another may need better organizational skills. Some employees may have health or mental health issues such as depression that contribute to low levels of productivity, and others may have a substance abuse issue. Dozens of reasons exist, but procrastination in each case is a symptom. When you have troubled employees, contact the EAP to discuss each one separately. Then, with the help of the EAP, decide on the approach you wish to take.

■ **I have always been praised for my attention to detail, but unfortunately it is really part of my micromanagement problem. I am trying to change, but how?**

Most people know that micromanagement defines behavior associated with difficulty in delegating work, but this is only part of the story. Micromanagement occurs when supervisors become overly obsessed with the extreme details of the job and thereby overly controlling of the work of subordinates. Coaching by another supervisor who knows how to delegate and how to spot micromanagement behaviors is a crucial step in your plan for change. Contacting the EAP is also strongly recommended so you can address resistance to change that you will experience, insecurity in your role, organizational culture issues that contribute to the pressure you face to control work, concern over the stability of your position, anger at others when they make decisions without your approval, and other factors that may influence the pressure you feel to micromanage.

■ **I know what bullying in the workplace means, but what is "mobbing" in the workplace?**

Mobbing is a form of bullying. It is used in the literature to describe a group of employees bullying another employee, as opposed to bullying perpetrated by a single employee. Supervisory personnel may be unaware of mobbing because employee behavior is often covert. An aggressive form of mobbing would include a group of employees who target an employee by using rumor, innuendo, intimidation, and isolation in order to force that person to resign. Mobbing can impose significant psychological stress on victims, with consequential problems of low productivity, depression, and emotional stress. If you identify mobbing behavior in the workplace, act to end it immediately, and refer victims to the EAP for support, and incorporate the EAP in any plan that includes corrective action for perpetrators.