

# WORKPLACE TRENDS & STRATEGIES

APRIL 2009

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## Some Recent Questions to the EAP:

**Q. I see a fair amount of disrespect between coworkers on the job—things like backbiting, name-calling, gossip, and being inappropriate with jokes. I attribute it to stress and the economy; after all, employees need to vent a little, right?**

**A.** Don't be fooled, it isn't the stress, and it isn't "just the nature of the business." If backbiting, name-calling, gossip, and general nastiness are the norm where you work, then you've got yourself a respect problem—one that you need to address. Few things buy trouble like excusing bad behavior. Left unchecked, disrespectful interactions feed on themselves, growing into a culture of personal conflict and simmering resentment that will eventually undermine your mission and productivity. No one wants to work in such an environment, and your best employees certainly won't. They'll leave, and you'll be stuck with the mess. Respect is an institutional mind-set that must be promoted and practiced from the top down. As a manager, you're on the front line in this struggle, and although it can be daunting, you have the influence and control to stop it.

**Q. How can I be better at documentation? I've been criticized for not sticking to the facts when I write, but if one of my employees demonstrates a continual pattern of conflict with others, I would say the "facts" are that the employee has a conflict-ridden personality.**

**A.** Good documentation is clear, useful, and measurable. To make your documentation more effective, imagine you are in the bleachers of a stadium, observing the behavior of people down below. Simply record the what, when, how, and where. You may have a strong desire to include a psychological conclusion in your documentation, especially if you have observed the behavior for very long. However, you are not an expert on your employee's personality no matter how long you have observed the employee's behavior. You can see and hear conflict on the job, but you can't see your employee's personality. You do not need to arrive at a conclusion for documentation to be effective. Documentation that focuses on the underlying causes of behavior (also called armchair diagnosis) will undermine your objective—correction of the problematic behavior.

**Q. I have many employees and I must ensure that they stay motivated. I know employees have to motivate themselves and that I can't do it for them. So what is my role in the process? How do I play an influential part in motivating employees?**

**A.** It's been said that motivating a large group of employees can be like herding a group of cats. Each one is an individual, and therefore you must look at employee motivation in much the same way. Motivating the employees you supervise starts with getting to know them as individuals. This doesn't mean you probe them for personal information. Instead, it means spending time with them individually, getting to know them at work, and discovering their likes and dislikes in the general course of a workplace relationship. Through this process, your employees will perceive that you care about them, and this is crucial to creating an atmosphere where motivation flourishes. Eventually you will get a strong feel for the ways each of your employees can be motivated, and you can plan opportunities and rewards that fit these unique aspects of their motivational profile and personality makeup.

**Q. I want to make a good impression on my employees now that I am their new supervisor. What will employees focus on most as they “size me up” over the next several months?**

**A.** Your employees will pay attention to what you say, but what you do will make a stronger impression. Many supervisors make the error of focusing on impressing employees with their knowledge in the quest to gain respect. However, rule number one is to be a visible worker who puts in a full day and comes to work on time. If you demand excellence from employees, be sure to hold yourself to the same standards. Nothing will sow resentment faster than being absent from pitching in to accomplish the work, especially if your office or shop is in the same location. If you are not a visible supervisor, communicate frequently with employees so they can understand the goals and objectives you are pursuing.

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