



# FrontLine Supervisor

UT Employee Assistance Program • (800) 346-3549

■ The literature often uses the word “loyal” when describing valued employees. I want employees to work hard, show respect, and give their best to the company, but to me as a supervisor, loyalty seems a little strong, like “blind allegiance.” Can you clarify this term?

**Loyalty implies that** your employee exhibits a strong sense of commitment, trust, or allegiance to you as their supervisor. Disloyal employees will typically experience more disagreements with their supervisor, perceive a lack of support or fairness in the workplace, and show strained communication with their supervisor. Like someone tending a garden, supervisors must constantly be on the move, addressing conflicts and concerns among workers. Doing so helps produce loyal workers. Your employees will feel a sense of loyalty if you remain transparent and open with information, offer support and recognition, set a positive example in your work style that they can follow, resolve conflicts, listen, give them feedback, and show a genuine interest in their lives. Demonstrated disloyalty is often the sign of a troubled employee. Work with your EAP to either help the employee or analyze what more you can do to improve your supervision style to nurture the loyalty you need.

■ A tragic incident occurred at work, and I felt caught off guard because employees immediately looked to me for direction and leadership. Frankly, I was at a loss to know where to begin. I felt I let folks down. How can supervisors improve their ability to respond to a crisis?

**Take proactive steps** to build your crisis management know-how. For less than \$10, you can take a course online from a website like Udemy.com. They have supervisor courses in crisis management that address your issues of concern. Speak to your HR advisor. Discover any existing crisis or incident protocols. Be well versed in these emergency response procedures (evacuation, shelter-in-place protocols, and first aid). Schedule a periodic review of procedures. As a rule, be calm and demonstrate resilience in a crisis. Immediately establish regular communication channels, like group meetings, emails, or instant messages, to keep everyone updated. Don't become dictatorial in a crisis, but rely on the experience and common sense of an assembled team to help address issues. Prioritize the well-being of employees, and reinforce use of the EAP. Ask about the EAP's crisis management support capabilities. Remember, no one can anticipate every possible disruption, but taking proactive steps can make you better prepared to face them.

■ I think my employees have good stress management skills. I don't detect any signs or symptoms of excessive workloads. I figure if they don't speak up, it is safe to say that work distribution is about right. Correct?

**There are reasons an** employee might not choose to complain about their workload. However, engaging with workers, asking questions, and listening carefully will help you discover those workers who are in distress. An employee might worry that expressing concerns about the workload could lead to negative consequences, such as being seen as incapable of handling the work. Pressure to conform to this perceived norm and avoid standing out might keep them mum. Also, a strong desire to please the supervisor or maintain a positive image within the team could explain not speaking up. Job security concerns are another issue if the employee

believes complaining would make him or her appear expendable. Another reason to engage with workers is to be able to spot performance issues that could be related to problems like depression, stress, anxiety, and conflict. These can be “masked,” which means you don’t see the symptoms.

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■ **What are some tips for building relationships with employees in the workplace with the goal of understanding their needs and strengths and detecting issues and problems (even personal problems) earlier?**

**There are many ways** to get to know your employees. 1) Make it OK for employees to meet you for conversations, and establish safe spaces so they can share with you privately what’s important. 2) A few times a year, schedule regular meetings for a few minutes one-on-one to discuss workload and challenges. 3) Do not discuss just work. Show real concern for their well-being by expressing interest in their work life and happiness on the job. 4) Share and disclose some of your own work struggles in your career history so employees see the “real you.” This will make you relatable, which is a powerful relationship-building dynamic that builds loyalty. 5) Be quicker to understand and learn employees’ perspectives rather than make immediate judgment calls about their work, ideas, and problems. 6) Offer feedback and praise. This will cause them to speak up sooner about challenges before they become larger problems.

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■ **Is there a way to be supportive yet confrontational with my supervisor in an effort to get him coaching help for communication and style issues affecting me and my supervisor peers? We believe everyone would be happier and far less stressed if he used the EAP for this sort of assistance.**

**Being assertive with** your supervisor requires a few preparatory steps, and you should consider role-playing the following with the EAP. Be sure to choose a private, respectful, and confidential tone when you meet with your boss. Talk about yourself first. Express your commitment to the team’s success and that you want to address a concern affecting the work environment. Then share very specific behaviors/actions that are causing distress. Be sure the examples are “observable,” “date-specific” behaviors. State the impact on the team or your work group. Avoid “you” statements that can be perceived as blame. Next, express concern for your boss’s well-being, such as, “It seems there’s been a lot of pressure on you lately.” Connect this to asking whether you or the team can do something to alleviate stress or take pressure off in some way. Propose using the EAP to improve the work situation and help the team. Listen to the response. Your boss may decide to seek assistance but never let you know it.

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## NOTES