FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Both employees and supervisors can experience burnout, but what characteristics of burnout are generally more experienced by supervisory personnel?

Supervisor burnout and employee burnout have similar causes but can include different characteristics because of the individuals' respective roles.

- Do you experience a loss of enthusiasm in the role of leader for employees you supervise?
- Do you find your employees more annoying or unlikable than ever before?
- Do you resent or feel cynical toward employees who love their work?
- Do you find that you're growing angrier with upper management, administration, and your supervisor peers?
- Do your supervisor peers mention or joke that you are too cynical?
- Do you remain behind a closed office door more often than before, unable to be reached by employees?

Answering yes to questions like these indicates a danger of experiencing burnout. You should consider taking proactive steps to rebound before your condition escalates. The EAP can help by providing a safe place to discuss your current situation and the constructive steps to bring more balance back into your life.

What are the missteps of supportive supervisors who, although they really believe in the EAP, unwittingly send a message to the employees in an organization that the EAP is not a safe source of help?

An EAP is designed to attract employees with its greatest asset being its confidentiality. Employee-clients should have no doubts about it. However, supervisors can undermine the program perception by how they apply it in different situations. For example, an EAP is not a disciplinary program, but can be viewed as such if a supervisor's referral of an employee is perceived attitudinally as a punitive step in correcting performance. Also, supervisors who discuss the referral of an employee with others who have no need to know can damage the fragile nature of an EAP's perception as a safe place that maintains confidentiality. Another misstep includes making an improper and indelible record in some manner of an employee's participation that others in the organization will discover. The bottom line is this: Employees will always have a collective opinion about the nature of EAP confidentiality. This word-of-mouth marketing is crucial, and supervisors must understand how vulnerable it is to being influenced for better or worse by what supervisors say and do.

I am a new manager. I want to be a leader who can influence change within the work culture (or at least within my department), so people become more respectful and positive toward each other. Where do I begin?

A positive workplace has roots in an institutional mindset that flows from the top down. It begins by focusing on yourself and developing a keen self-awareness for how you engage with employees. Spend a week or so understanding what individual employees are trying to achieve and what they think about the work unit. In these interactions, are you being authentic and vulnerable, which means "being yourself" rather than cool and distant? Your communication style is one key piece in helping produce the work environment you desire (or undermining it) because it is amplified by your role. It is also modeled. Some people mistakenly believe a positive workplace is a matter of good luck. They point to it being the result of the type of work, a sunny office, or a few strong and cheery personalities who are role models for others to follow. Consult with the EAP to help you develop the communication style and engagement skills you need in order to reach your goal of creating an energized office that matches your vision.