

November 2017

I oversee first responders. Many deny being under any stress, but stress is a reality of their job. I suggested stress management training but most showed no interest. Is a stress management class a waste of time?

Recently, there has been a lot in the news about sexual harassment. What sorts of behaviors should supervisors be aware of so we can confront this and other types of harassment that can cause issues within the workplace?

I was hired to replace a supervisor who left the organization. There is a history of conflict, and I need to earn trust. I don't think this will be easy due to past experiences. How do I get employees to trust me? What role could the EAP play in helping me?

There are two common issues among employees where a duty to serve requires a selfless commitment to others. The first is recognizing stress and the second is acknowledging it. It is beneficial to educate employees about stress and how to manage it better. We all have stress, but people who place others' well-being ahead of their own, tend to overlook their own self-care at times. By providing ongoing education about what stress is, how it works, how it harms, how to manage it, and symptoms associated with chronic stress you remind them that a key to helping others is to take care of yourself first.

Behavior that is intimidating, hostile, or offensive to reasonable people is considered harassment. Characteristically, it is unwanted behavior. So, notice and do not tolerate unwelcome or offensive conduct. Harassment can be illegal when it is based on sex (including sexual orientation, pregnancy, and gender identity), race, color, national origin, religion, age, and/or disability. Some examples include offensive jokes, slurs, name-calling, undue attention, threats or acts of physical aggression, unwelcome touching or contact, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, constant or unwelcome questions about an individual's identity, and offensive objects or pictures. Consult with your manager and/or HR adviser for clarification on matters concerning harassment. It is important to document corrective actions and referring employees to the EAP may be considered as part of a corrective action plan. Remember as a supervisor, you can have an important role in prevention when you act on situations that could be perceived as offensive.

Although your employees had past experiences that created a sense of distrust, it is human nature to trust another person over fearing them and the benefits of a trusting relationship far outweigh your employees' distrust. Allow trust and approachability to naturally emerge by practicing behaviors recommended for any supervisor. Engage with your direct reports and share "small" but personal things about yourself. Your employees will make a mental note of these interactions and your willingness to be vulnerable. This will demonstrate you are initiating trust with them, which is naturally reciprocal. Demonstrate trust in other ways by backing and supporting your employees, take chances with their abilities. Some employees may resist trusting you due to past experiences, but this will not likely be the majority. You can also consult with the EAP on specific issues you encounter to help you build the winning team you want.