

# Frontline Supervisor



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■ **I read recently that depression may be contagious or an infectious disease. How is this possible?**

**Major depression** affects 15-20 percent of the population. A research report from Stony Brook University in November received widespread attention because its author supported further investigation into the possibility that major depression could be the result of “some parasitic, bacterial, or viral infection” not yet identified. Infectious was mischaracterized as contagious in other media. The two do not necessarily equate. Not long ago, stomach ulcers were determined to be caused by *H. pylori* bacteria, not stress. The idea is similar. With regard to the workplace, many studies have shown that employee morale can affect the attitudes and behaviors of coworkers. In this sense, depression’s effects can be “contagious” if behavioral issues of those affected by it influence others and negatively impact morale or productivity. Rely on the EAP when you are concerned about an employee’s behavior. Do not attempt to decide whether an employee is or is not depressed.

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■ **My best technician can be a little rough. He’s bossy, teases the apprentice about his intelligence, calls him “little buddy,” and yells at him. The puzzling piece is that they get along with each other 90 percent of the time, go bowling together, etc. Should I step in and intervene?**

**You should meet** with your technician to ensure that any behaviors you consider offensive stop. Document your meeting, including his response. You are able to personally judge the behaviors as inappropriate, and despite your apprentice’s apparent lack of assertiveness or willingness to come to you for help, you have a duty of care to maintain a work environment that is safe, respectful, and supportive of his well-being. These are bullying behaviors because they target one person and show a pervasive ongoing pattern of abuse. The apprentice may be tolerating this bullying behavior out of fear, or coping with it in ways that are beyond your awareness. For example, he may suffer ill effects like sleeping problems or depression. The victimized employee’s socializing with this person does not diminish the importance of the steps you should take. Consider consulting with the EAP about a formal referral if the behavior does not stop after your meeting.

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■ **What should I measure to know if my work unit is characterized as having “good communication?” I would like to gauge the quality of communication**

**A work unit** characterized by good communication will typically demonstrate strong employee engagement, strong teams with high morale, and the ability to witness a competitive spirit among a productive group of people. One or more of these things is usually adversely affected when internal communication suffers. Delving deeper, the most commonly cited employee complaints linked to problematic communication are

**and then respond accordingly, if needed.**

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■ **Everyone in our office is smart, but we are all easily distracted. I am sure some of us must be affected by ADHD, but we have a reputation for innovation and corporate entrepreneurship. Is there any need for us to get collective EAP help or should we just leave well enough alone?**

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■ **We have some pretty uncivil people in our workplace. I'm not talking about bullying, but instead nasty notes, silent treatments, withholding information, or not inviting someone to lunch. What can supervisors do? Perhaps I am just oversensitive and shouldn't care.**

information flow between management and line staff, and lack of recognition and praise for employees. When you have a troubled employee or an employee who is not performing to expected standards, always analyze at least those couple of factors mentioned above and the role they might play in your approach to correcting performance. This is because behavioral manifestations of personal problems are often influenced or exacerbated by issues in the work environment, also referred to as corporate climate.

**Research has** shown that distractions can consume as much as a third of the typical workday. These include interruptions like the Internet, email, chitchat in the hallway, snacking, meetings, etc. As an experiment, take one distraction like hallway chitchat and intervene with it. Brainstorm an incentive program and accountability mechanism that includes peer monitoring to try to curtail it. An incentive program will allow employees to motivate themselves. Have a weekly vote to see who appeared least distracted. Back it up with an accountability strategy. The accountability strategy might be a tradition that allows any employee to call another coworker “off-task” if he or she appears to be idly chitchatting. Critical for making this experiment work is spending a few minutes regularly meeting and reinforcing the intervention strategy so it does not plateau, diminish, and stop. Talk to the EAP. EA professionals are keen on exploring and researching workplace behavior intervention strategies.

**Lost productivity,** diminished employee loyalty, and turnover costs all stem from incivility in the workplace. Workplace civility often stems from the absence of visible, proactive leadership and regular communication. If you have characteristically been visibly absent or you seldom meet to discuss team issues, start doing so. You may see some of these behaviors instantly stop. Employees take their cues from you on how to speak, behave, and engage with others. They notice your attitude, demeanor, personality, disposition, and how you treat others. All of these things play a role in influencing their behavior. You possess a natural form of power that comes from the right to be in charge, make decisions, and enforce standards. This is wonderful leverage for creating a positive work environment. Incivility is motivated by the desire to exert power over another, demonstrate frustration, or attain something desired. Tell employees you want a more civil workplace and expect it to happen. You will be surprised at how fast things can turn around.

To refer an employee to the EAP, or to consult about a supervisory or organizational issue, please call **800-869-0276**. To view an on-line supervisory training about the EAP, please visit the Member Access page of the EAP's web site at [www.eapconsultants.com](http://www.eapconsultants.com). If you don't know your password, please email us at [password@eapconsultants.com](mailto:password@eapconsultants.com).