

## Guest Perspective

# Supervisors play crucial role in solid employee relations

GIVEN THE POST-KATRINA difficulty in finding qualified labor and the ever-present risk of employment litigation, it is important to keep an eye on the relationship between your employees and supervisors.

Employees who have no confidence in their supervisors are likely to feel they have no representation in the workplace. This makes them more of a turnover risk, less productive and more likely to cause legal trouble either during or after their employment.

Too many times supervisors do not realize the impact they have on employee morale and just how important their role is in positive employee relations. Years ago, a well-known survey asked hundreds of supervisors from various companies to rank 10 workplace morale factors in the order they thought their employees would rank them, from most important to least important.

As you might expect, most supervisors believed good wages and job security were the most important factors in determining employee morale. Here is how the supervisors said their employees would rank the 10 morale factors:

- 1) Good wages.
- 2) Job security.
- 3) Promotion, growth in the company.
- 4) Good working conditions.
- 5) Interesting work.
- 6) Personal loyalty to workers.
- 7) Tactful discipline.
- 8) Full appreciation of work done.
- 9) Sympathetic help on personal problems.
- 10) Feeling "in" on things.

In the same survey, more than 30,000 employees in the same companies were asked to rank these 10 factors in order of importance to them. Here is how the employees ranked them:

- 1) Full appreciation of work done.
- 2) Feeling "in" on things.
- 3) Sympathetic help on personal problems.
- 4) Job security.
- 5) Good wages.
- 6) Interesting work.
- 7) Promotion, growth in company.
- 8) Personal loyalty to workers.
- 9) Good working conditions.
- 10) Tactful discipline.

As you can see, the supervisor rankings were almost upside down and opposite from their employee rankings of the same factors. Unfortunately, that mindset continues today.

Many supervisors mistakenly believe economic items such as wages and benefits are the primary factors in employee morale. They also tend to think what makes their employees happy is out of their control or not their responsibility.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The first four factors on the employee list deal with communication, which falls squarely within the supervisor's daily responsibilities. Employees want recognition for a job well done. They want to feel they have a stake in what's going on. They want someone to talk to who



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will listen and be sympathetic to their concerns, and they want the kind of job security that comes from their supervisors treating them on an even keel each day.

An employee's day or week may be ruined because they did not get a pat on the back for a task or a job well done. On the other hand, the supervisor may have no clue he or she failed to seize on an opportunity to solidify the employment relation-

ship by giving a nod for a job well done.

All supervisors should create their own good employee relations program. It begins immediately after hire, where the supervisor, during the orientation phase, pays extra attention to the employee and makes sure he or she is comfortable and confident in their new position. From the outset, employees should have loyalty to the supervisor, not fellow employees.

Thereafter, supervisors should engage in constant communications with employees, seek feedback on the job and proactively solicit questions and concerns from employees.

All supervisors should engage in constructive discipline of their employees with their No. 1 goal being to turn that employee into a model employee, not to build a record against the employee for termination purposes. Even terminations, when they occur, can have a positive impact on the work force if all employees believe the employee was treated fairly by the supervisor.

Good supervision and constructive communications are the most crucial factors in preventing morale problems among employees. They also play a critical role in minimizing the risk of workplace complaints, litigation and high turnover, which costs an employer money and lost productivity.

So what does it take to be a good supervisor? Follow these 15 good supervisory keys:

- 1) Know your people as individuals.
- 2) Be approachable and a good listener.
- 3) Be responsive to questions and concerns.
- 4) Always follow up with employees.
- 5) Apply policies and practices consistently.
- 6) Keep employees informed about the business.
- 7) Communicate employee concerns up the line.
- 8) Recognize employee efforts.
- 9) Train employees in all aspects of their job.
- 10) Seek ideas on how to do things better.
- 11) Develop your own technical job skills.
- 12) Expect, believe in and encourage good work.
- 13) Constructively counsel employees.
- 14) Use authority with reason and restraint.
- 15) Admit mistakes and correct them.

It is critical for all supervisors to understand the vital role they play in good employee relations.

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