



Q. I am a new boss and would like my employees to consider me a good one. I am not charismatic, but what can I do? How can I act to inspire and motivate them to believe in me and follow me as a leader?

A. Charismatic leaders typically demonstrate strong beliefs and are passionate about work goals. They imagine magnificent outcomes that their peers often consider unattainable. However, their genuineness and passion inspire others. This level of enthusiasm is infectious, creates engaged workers, and contributes to a positive work unit. This is what employees want. They want to be excited, and they want leadership demonstrated. You can adopt this leadership style without charisma. Commit yourself to your role and aim high. Seek input from outside resources, mentors, and personal sources of inspiration so that you can pass this energy on to your employees. This is crucial. If you remain a manager who is open-minded, teachable, and hungry to learn, and you are excited to share that energy with others, then you'll have a hard-working, dedicated team that will talk about you in positive terms for years to come.

Q. How are employees negatively affected by my not dealing with an underperforming employee? Over the years, I've held off dealing with some substandard performers, often "long timers" with nonproductive work habits. I backed off because others seemed to pick up the slack and it's a hassle to intervene.

A. It's stressful confronting employees and dealing with poor performers, especially longtime employees who may suddenly question why after so many years you are now "picking" on them. However, not doing so will create larger problems. When you send a nonverbal message to other workers that your expectations are not very high, outstanding workers who typically perform well with little supervision can succumb to a nonverbal message that you will accept mediocrity. As a result, they may not perform at their peak level because you apparently don't care. Your best workers may have high standards or may work for anticipated future rewards, but they naturally respond to the standards and expectations that the organization sets. You undermine this productivity dynamic by letting some workers just get by. Not expecting the best of your employees will engender a work unit characterized by malaise and morale problems – they know when someone is not pulling his or her weight. Consult with CONCERN to help you plan an effective approach.

Q. I got angry at an employee who has been doing a lousy job, and I'm sure I was pretty intimidating. How can I keep my emotions under wraps in the future? Do I need anger management counseling?

A. To reduce your risk of becoming angry in a performance counseling session, spend time planning the meeting and what you want to focus on. Have a game plan that includes how you don't want to act. This will help you create the proper mind-set. A lack of structure will predispose you to act emotionally because of your feeling that you have little control over the process. This feeling will be made worse if your employee is provocative or shows indifference. Avoid feeling pressured by time in such meetings. This adds to your anxiety. Maintaining a constructive tone and calm, professional demeanor flows from proper planning, not from the practice of anger control techniques. However, if a pattern of anger reveals itself in such meetings, contact CONCERN.

Q. It's difficult initiating conversations that an employee will find alarming and disappointing — things like dismissals, transfers, moving an office, reduction in hours, or other shockers. My problem is procrastination. How do I act sooner?

A. Recognizing the problem of procrastination indicates you're halfway to solving it. Procrastination is the number one roadblock and compounding issue that makes any difficult conversation more stressful, and is the best predictor of an undesirable reaction. Almost universally, difficult conversations are delayed for one reason: waiting for the perfect time. (Example: It would be easier to tell an employee their job was being eliminated after he or she won the lottery.) To make difficult conversations easier, don't delay. It is not necessary to rehearse in front of a mirror. More helpful is knowing the answers to all the questions your employees might ask. This will reduce your anxiety the most. If you feel overwhelmed by the prospect of the meeting, talk with CONCERN to process your concerns, fears, or guilt. You'll feel more empowered, and you'll be better prepared to be of help to your employees, regardless of their reactions.

Q. Sexual harassment in the workplace has been around forever, and most employers have policies that point out the illegality of it as well as the consequences for perpetrators. Is there anything new to know about this age-old unacceptable behavior?

A. Just when it seemed that employers were getting the upper hand on sexual harassment, along came technology, and with it came new risks. Prevention training is important, but supervisors should also play an active role and intervene where appropriate to curtail behaviors that could constitute sexual harassment. There simply is no substitute for this role. New risks are posed by instant messaging, blog posts, chats, emails, text messaging, and social media sites. These tools allow instant irretrievable communication, which naturally increases the risk of sexual harassment in daily communications.

However, education may be working, because according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the total number of claims filed for sexual harassment has decreased each year since 2010. On the other hand, the number of total claims filed by men has increased to about 17.6% of total filings. Meanwhile, the dollar value of financial awards to victims has risen dramatically. For the latest statistics, go to www.eeoc.gov and type "sexual harassment charges 2013" in the search bar at the top.

Remember: CONCERN: EAP teams with Human Resources to provide another resource for managers and supervisors to consult about how to manage issues with individuals, within and between work groups, and across departments. When you call CONCERN: EAP, ask for a Management Consultation or request to speak to a Clinical Manager.

Here are some quotes from HR Managers who recently called on CONCERN for a Management Consultation:

"The counselor was a great partner. I have worked with several CONCERN on-site counselors, and she is probably the best I've worked with so far. I also really appreciate CONCERN's assistance and follow up through our situation. Thanks again."

"The counselor was amazing and was such a great leader for this discussion. She was thoughtful and provided us a safe atmosphere to talk about the situation. I had numerous employees come up to me after the meeting to tell them how much the counselor and the experience meant to them. Thank you!"

"I was impressed with someone getting back to me on a Sunday afternoon under urgent and unfortunate circumstances. The counselor was a great help to our employees and was very well received."