

Leading Well – September 2026

Practical Questions & Answers for Frontline Leaders

Q: My employee used to be talkative and engaged, but over the past month he has become noticeably quieter and keeps to himself. His performance is still solid. Should I be concerned?

A: A change in behavior is worth paying attention to, even when performance remains acceptable. Leaders are not expected to diagnose personal problems, but they should notice meaningful shifts in an employee's usual demeanor. Increased withdrawal can sometimes reflect stress, family concerns, health issues, burnout, or other challenges occurring outside the workplace.

Rather than assuming something is wrong, consider a simple, supportive conversation. Focus on your observation rather than your interpretation. For example: "I've noticed you've seemed quieter than usual lately. How are things going?" Employees may choose not to share details, and that's okay. The goal is to demonstrate support and concern.

Strong leaders address concerns early rather than waiting for performance to suffer. If you're unsure how to start the conversation, the EAP can provide guidance through a confidential supervisor consultation.

Q: I've always believed I have an open-door policy, but recently I was told that some employees find me intimidating. How can both things be true?

A: An open door and an approachable presence are not necessarily the same thing. Many leaders make themselves physically available while unintentionally sending signals that discourage employees from speaking openly.

Consider what employees experience when they enter your office. Do you stop what you're doing and give them your attention? Do you appear rushed, distracted, or frustrated? How do you react when employees bring bad news or admit mistakes? Employees quickly learn whether conversations feel safe or risky. Approachability is built through active listening, curiosity, empathy, and consistency. Employees are far

more likely to speak up when they believe they will be heard rather than judged. Approachable leaders create an environment where employees feel comfortable raising concerns before they become problems.

Q: Two employees on my team are getting along poorly. They aren't openly arguing, but the tension is affecting morale. Should I wait to see if they work it out themselves?

A: Minor disagreements can sometimes resolve naturally, but ongoing tension rarely improves through avoidance alone. When conflict lingers, coworkers notice. Communication suffers, morale declines, and productivity often follows.

Meet privately with each employee to understand their perspective and reinforce expectations for respectful workplace behavior. Focus on actions rather than personalities. The goal is not determining who is right or wrong but ensuring employees can work together professionally.

Many leaders avoid conflict for fear of making matters worse. In reality, unresolved conflict rarely improves on its own. Early intervention helps preserve trust and prevents small frustrations from becoming larger workplace issues.

If you're unsure how to facilitate a productive conversation, the EAP can provide coaching and guidance on conflict management strategies.

Q: An employee's attitude has changed noticeably over the past several weeks. I'm not sure whether I should say something, involve HR, or simply continue monitoring the situation. What should I do?

A: When leaders find themselves asking, "Should I be concerned?" it's usually a sign that some level of action is appropriate. That doesn't mean assuming the worst or immediately escalating the situation. It means paying attention to observable workplace behaviors and determining whether a conversation is warranted.

Start by focusing on observable changes. Has the employee become withdrawn, irritable, less engaged, or resistant to feedback? Are coworkers noticing changes?

One of the most valuable and underutilized EAP services is supervisor consultation. A confidential discussion with an EAP professional can help you evaluate the situation, prepare for a conversation, and determine whether additional support or resources may be appropriate.

You don't have to wait for declining performance or a crisis before seeking guidance. Often, the most effective leadership decisions begin with addressing concerns early.

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