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EMPLOYMENT LAWSCENE ALERT: SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYERS RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING WELL-TRAINED SUPERVISORS

Employers in today's society are faced with a variety of workplace challenges, from complying with complex and often confusing employment laws to effectively managing a diverse workforce comprised of individuals from a broad spectrum of society. Let's face it: managing your workforce, making the right employment decisions with regard to hiring, promotions, and terminations; and complying with the numerous, complicated, and sometimes overlapping federal, state, and local employment laws is no easy task. It is even more difficult in these uncertain economic times as employers struggle to maintain their workforce amidst declining revenue and increased costs. The numerous recent changes in employment laws, like the NLRB decisions on union organizing and elections, and proposed changes, such as updates to the FLSA Overtime Exemption, that are certain to take place, will not make things any easier for employers. Successful employers realize that the success of their business to comply with these numerous and complex challenges is dependent upon well-trained supervisors.

A supervisor has several key roles that are essential to the success of the workplace. One of the most critical roles of the supervisor is to carry forward the mission and the vision of the company. This requires the supervisor to embrace and foster the values of the company and to instill those values in the workforce. A supervisor must also possess the technical skills to support the organization, the management skills to achieve the objectives and goals of the company, and the people skills to effectively lead and communicate with employees to enable them to achieve the goals of their job. Supervisors must also direct employees, instruct them, and ensure that they follow organizational policies and procedures. Moreover, supervisors must make important decisions with regard to hiring, job assignments, job performance and evaluation, promotions, pay increases, accommodations, discipline, and termination, all while complying with a myriad of state and federal laws.

Given these very large and demanding responsibilities, individuals placed in a supervisory position soon begin to realize that they have not been given the skills and tools necessary to handle all the dynamic challenges of the job. Successful employers, however, recognize this shortfall and provide their supervisors either inside or outside training to help these individuals become good and successful supervisors.

What defines a good and successful supervisor? A good supervisor is a leader and a motivator who promotes teamwork, teaches safe and efficient work practices, and consistently communicates and enforces work rules and policies. A good supervisor understands his or her role within your organization and the importance of communicating the vision and mission of the company to employees. A good supervisor also demonstrates a loyalty to the values of your company and values the people that contribute to the success of your organization – your employees! Many employers rightly recognize that it is their employees who represent their most important asset and who, in most cases, make the difference between a successful company and an unsuccessful company. Employers also recognize that the best way to achieve value from their employees is to have good and well-trained supervisors who are committed to maximizing the productivity from each and every employee. Well-

motivated employees are more productive than less-motivated employees. This is a simple truism but one that is often neglected by employers. Employees who are not motivated in their jobs have lower morale, lower productivity, and diminished loyalty to the organization. Consequently, employees who are not motivated in their jobs usually become disinterested and unsatisfied in their jobs, which, in turn, leads to increased employee turnover and higher operating costs and lower profit margins for the employer. Supervisors are the individuals who have the most influence and effect upon an employee's motivation.

Well-trained supervisors have the ability to enhance an employee's motivation and the overall morale of your workforce. Well-trained supervisors understand that by (i) treating employees fairly; (ii) valuing and appreciating employees' efforts and contributions to the company; (iii) recognizing their work; and (iv) assigning job tasks that match an employee's skills with the employee's interest in the job will increase employees' motivation and interest in their jobs. A good and productive employee is often times determined by a well-trained supervisor who understands that he or she must be a leader, a communicator, a teacher, and a motivator; sometimes all at the same time. These functions are what define a good supervisor.

Many readers, after reading this article, may think that they don't need to actively train their supervisors as their business is successful or profitable. However, being profitable or successful does not mean that you have good supervisors committed to the values of your company or that your employees are motivated or satisfied in their jobs. Also, giving an individual a "supervisor" job title does not make them automatically equipped to handle the various and demanding responsibilities of the job. To determine the level of your supervisors' understanding of their own role in your company, you should ask each of your supervisors the following three questions:

(1) How do you define your role as a supervisor in our company?

(2) What characteristics or traits do you believe you possess that makes you an effective supervisor?

(3) What is the most important skill you possess as a supervisor?

Depending on their answers, you may want to consider whether providing your supervisors training on the fundamentals of good supervision makes good business sense.