Q. Due to the coronavirus, we are asking every employee to work remotely if possible, but we don't have a remote work policy or anything like that yet. What basic issues of supervision should I consider to make sure employees are actually working as they should?

A. If you are new to the prospect of supervising remote workers, you will be inclined to ask first about how you can make sure the work is getting done. You will find lots of productivity tips and ideas online to help, but here's your first assignment: Learn and discover what makes remote employment more stressful than many people assume. For example, there is no live supervision—someone to turn to with a question. The simplest problem often cannot be solved because the one employee who knows the answer is unavailable. The double-edged sword of isolation and distractions is unceasing because relationships in the home and the needs of family members ultimately take priority, no matter what house rules have been established to help the remote worker function. How can the EAP help? Your awareness of these stressors can help support workers. Most will be honest, diligent, and hardworking. As you hear of or perceive distress about remote worker concerns, you can refer your employees to the EAP to discover solutions that work for them.

Q. I know giving employees feedback is important, but how do I know if I am giving them enough?

A. The best way to find out is to ask: "Do I give you enough feedback on your work—including both positive and negative aspects of what you do?" You will be surprised at how many employees say you are giving enough feedback when you believe it isn't that much. Others will say you aren't offering enough, even though you think you are giving plenty. The good news is that you will discover what employees need and will be able to allocate your time where it is wanted and needed most.

Q. I read recently that 60% of workers are too intimidated to bring a problem to their boss. I don't think my employees are in this group, but maybe I am fooling myself or in denial. How can managers help employees be more willing to bring their problems forward?

A. As a manager, you must continually "market" your approachability by what you say and do. Even if you believe you are a nice person with a soft disposition, you will need to help employees remember that. You do this by regularly engaging with them and inviting them to bring their problems forward. Managers, supervisors, and other authority figures possess degrees of control or at least hold influence over a worker's employment status. This is enough to prevent employees from feeling completely comfortable in bringing a problem to the boss, or in rocking the boat; they're likely to be unsure of how the boss will react. This is a natural dynamic associated with fear, but it is easy to overcome. Your awareness of this dynamic is half the battle. Your EAP is the perfect consultant to help examine your relationship with your work group, troubleshoot communication problems, and offer guidance on individual employee problems.

Source: hbr.org search ["managers more intimidating"]