No matter what sort of stress employees experience—or, for that matter, lack of stress—nearly all employees think about their careers and what they will be doing differently someday. Be realistic, but engage your employees about this topic from time to time, and demonstrate you’re on the lookout for what will be the next steps for them in the way of skill, opportunities, continuing education, etc. Don’t be a manager or supervisor who disappears on the job. When employees are stressed, feelings of...
isolation can set in. Your energy as a manager and your influence can play a powerful role by breaking a naturally negative self-talk script employees are prone to playing under stress. The point: Stay engaged. Also, be sure to develop relationships with your employees. Each one is different, and they will handle stress in different ways. Understanding workers under your supervision will allow you to offer support tailored to their individual needs. The managerial behaviors described above don’t eliminate stress—they simply facilitate and allow the employee’s natural ability to cope with stress to come forth.

I caught our mechanic drinking a beer on duty. He quickly admitted he was an alcoholic, and said he was going back to counseling and AA. I was impressed with his sincerity and felt relief, so I let the incident slide. I thought, “Okay, he is on the right track.” Was I manipulated?

Yes, you were manipulated, but your employee may have also been completely sincere. Sincerity, of course, does not translate to the proper treatment steps. So you should have acted on your organization’s drug and alcohol policy. How can you be manipulated at the same time your employee is being sincere? The answer lies in the nature of the disease. A crisis—caught drinking on the job—is enough for the alcoholic to experience a convincing sense of urgency (never-again determination) to stop drinking. However, the nature of the disease dictates its course, not willpower. This sense of urgency dissipates when withdrawal symptoms return. So, the likelihood of self-referral to treatment is low, but it can be heartfelt and sincere in the moment.

I am a new supervisor. I am sure there will be many challenges, but with all the different personalities of employees I supervise, how can I best help each one perform to his or her peak?

Understanding that each of your employees will see you differently, will relate to you differently, and will need different things from you is the place to start. Many managers make the mistake of seeing their employees as “the troops.” As such, they communicate with them as though they are Marines in a barracks waiting for orders. Take the opposite approach. It takes time, but over months and years, pay attention to how your employees are unique in five key ways: 1) Communication style and needs. 2) Career goals, hopes, dreams, education desires. 3) Motivation triggers and reward preferences. 4) Limitations, avoidances, and dislikes. 5) Leadership and problem-solving capacity. There are more, but these five hit most of the bases. Growing to understand each one will help maximize employee job satisfaction and productivity.