



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Question: What should supervisors expect when using the EAP for assistance in managing a troubled employee? If I use the EAP, does this reflect badly on my supervisory skills?

Answer: You can expect that EA professionals will be patient, understanding, and professional. Feeling heard will give you relief, and the EAP will help you document performance and behavior problems. You will also be given tips on how to properly confront the employee, if needed. When the employee's performance turns around, you may need follow-up support to adjust to the new dynamics of your relationship. If your employee's performance problems return, you will need to decide how to respond. Although the EAP cannot tell you what to do, you may want support as you consider your options. Turning to the EAP for consultative help is a smart move. It does not indicate that you are short on supervisory skills. When you have computer problems, you call a computer expert. When you need a wall painted, you call a painter. When you have people problems, call the EAP.

Question: I am a new supervisor. I long for the good old days when I could communicate openly with peers. Now I supervise them. Which is better, to earn respect by trying to be "one of the boys" or by detaching, being firm, and acting more aloof and business-like?

Answer: Those who supervise former peers must reevaluate prior relationships. As a supervisor, you must now use restraint over what you say and do because your new role will overshadow any familiarity of your previous role as a peer. You will lose the respect of your subordinates if you try to remain in your old role. This dynamic is well understood in the workplace. Employees want to have respect for the boss. They want to feel that they can count on you for tough decisions. Focusing on being a firm and fair supervisor is the best way to gain the respect of those you supervise. Many supervisors want to be liked and respected, but increasing familiarity with employees is not the way to go.

Question: My employee is getting thinner and thinner. When I said she didn't look very well, she said she restricts her diet to no more than 500 calories per day. This must be a symptom of an eating disorder. Now what do I do?

Answer: Although you are concerned, there may be very little you can do about it. As unhealthy as it appears, she may or may not have an eating disorder. However, expressing your concern and encouraging her to visit the EAP is appropriate. You can also consult with the EAP. Together you may spot intervention options appropriate to your role. It is not unusual for supervisors to detect signs and symptoms of personal problems among employees under their supervision. However, if quality of work, attendance, and conduct in the workplace are not an issue, management's role is usually limited. Family and friends typically have more leverage and influence until then.

Question: My employee says he has an appointment with the EAP to get assistance in lodging a complaint against management. Will the EAP get involved in such a matter? Since he already has an appointment, is the answer, "yes?"

Answer: Sometimes EAPs are improperly solicited to "take sides" and advocate for an employee in a complaint against management. Of course, this is a role EA professionals cannot play. Although employees may be reminded about other channels in the organization to assist them, such requests often set the stage to help troubled employees who would otherwise remain disgruntled. Many of these employees need better skills in communicating with supervisors, examining their behavior, and solving problems more effectively within their work units. Strong denial or other personal problems may inhibit their seeking such help. EA professionals explore issues brought by employees and they know there are often two sides to a story. What may begin as a plea to the EAP to join them in a pursuit against management ends with improved problem-solving skills and a willingness to constructively resolve disputes with management.

Question: My employee has a restraining order against a boyfriend. If he shows up at work, I am supposed to call the police. Management and HR have been informed. Should I suggest she seek assistance from the EAP?

Answer: Your employee cannot be held responsible for the behavior of another person and the decision of a court to protect her from that person with a restraining order. If your employee's performance (i.e., her conduct, quality of work, or attendance) is not an issue, your role as a supervisor is limited. The EAP can be helpful option for employees in this position. A restraining order, particularly one that has a "no contact" provision in it, often indicates that violence or a threat of harm has been perpetrated against the person who sought the order. Such employees may experience much anxiety, which can be addressed by the EA professional. It is appropriate to mention the EAP to your employee and encourage her to take advantage of its services.

Question: What role does the EAP play in increasing employee commitment to our organization?

Answer: Because most employees do not disclose their participation in the EAP, especially to managers, management may not hear how important the EAP is to employees or how moved many are to feel loyalty and commitment to the organization for offering such a service. EA professionals frequently hear how thankful employees are that the company sponsors an employee assistance program. Occasionally some employees with performance problems and personal troubles falsely believe that the organization is "out to get them" until they visit the EAP. This may be the turning point in recognizing their contribution to the difficulties they face with the organization. What often follows is more commitment to the employer, the work unit, and willingness to resolve personal problems. The employee comes to believe that the organization does have a stake in his or her success.

Call the EAP for a confidential consultation about supervisory concerns, job-related issues or personal problems.

Information contained in *Supervisor Notes* is for general information purposes only and is not intended as specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with your Employee Assistance Program professional.

