



SUPERVISOR NOTES

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

November 2002

Employee Assistance Program
278-5018 eap@csus.edu

Christopher Knight, Ph.D., EAP Director
Clary Tepper, Ph.D., Clinical Counselor
Demetra Mihalakos, M.F.T., Clinical Counselor

In This Issue:

When guilt and sympathy affect supervisor assertiveness

Employees with personal problems

Dismissing an employee

Steps a supervisor can take when an employee is accused of sexual harassment

What type of feedback should be given to an employee who is improving poor quality work

Information Update: The EAP here at CSUS has grown to include a third clinician, Clary Tepper, Ph.D. Clary obtained both her master's degree and her doctorate from Bryn Mawr College in the Philadelphia, PA area. She has worked in the counseling centers at three different universities (including a year at CSUS). She is accepting new appointments for both counseling and consulting. Demetra Mihalakos, MFT, continues in her role as staff clinician for the EAP, and she is also accepting new appointments. Christopher Knight, Ph.D., Director, is primarily doing administrative work these days and has a limited number of new appointments available.

Feeling guilty and sympathetic causes me to shy away from administrative actions I know I should take with troubled employees who aren't making changes. I kick myself every time I do it. Can the EAP help?

Only at my third confrontation of my employee about performance problems did he say marital problems were to blame. We agreed he would visit the EAP. I wish I could have learned about these problems earlier. What could I have done?

The EAP can help you with assertiveness skills needed to manage your employees. Start by seeing employees as responsible for taking charge of their lives and using resources like the EAP to resolve personal problems. Troubled employees use EAP resources less often when they do not feel accountable for satisfactory performance. You experience guilt when attempting to take appropriate administrative actions because you feel responsible for adverse effects on the employee that follow. You hesitate to see the employee as responsible for making such an action necessary. Your view contributes to worsening of performance or conduct problems. To maximize the potential of employees, support them and act earlier to hold them accountable for satisfactory performance. Believe that employees will act in their best interest with such an approach.

As you discovered, employees are not inclined to share information about their personal problems with employers. Some employees will not share such information even when termination looms. But, they may be very willing to accept a referral to the EAP. This objective, rather than discovery of personal problems, is your goal. So, there is nothing you should have done to learn of the personal problem sooner. Admittedly, a referral is more likely when personal problems are self-disclosed. Therefore, you could ask your employee if he or she believes something personal is interfering with performance. If the answer is yes, encourage use of the EAP. Do not probe further or counsel your employee.

My employee has been accused of sexual harassment by a female worker. Should I make a referral to the EAP while an investigation is pending? If so, what will the EAP do for him?

If you are a manager investigating a sexual harassment claim, it can be helpful to remind the accused employee that the EAP can offer support. It is especially important in this case to remind the employee that EAP services are confidential and that confidentiality is protected by state law. Prior to the completion of an investigation, support provided by the EAP may include helping the employee prepare for the possibility of a finding against him. An accused employee will frequently deny the intent to harass, and will have feelings of anger and betrayal toward the complainant. Although accused employees are usually warned against retaliation, support from the EAP can aid in preventing retaliation. If a finding of sexual harassment is formally made and a referral to the EAP follows, the EAP will consider other help to prevent further sexual harassment. Regardless of the outcome of a finding, both complainants and alleged harassers are usually very upset. This anxiety can affect performance, lead to depression, and affect one's personal life. This provides a rationale for referring both the complainant and the accused to the EAP.

My employee has made a great turn around in her performance. I am hesitant to praise her because I am worried she will assume I am no longer watchful. Should I praise her for what she does or warn her to keep up the good work?

Most employees respond well to positive feedback, so experience would support providing it. If you are concerned about how your employee might interpret positive feedback, consider holding a private meeting. You can then give the encouragement she needs while emphasizing that you expect the improved quality of her performance to continue. If your employee has a history of inconsistent work quality, doing this may be particularly important. If you do not give your employee positive feedback, the lack of communication may be interpreted as indifference on your part. This could precipitate a return to problems. The meeting with your employee gives you an opportunity to reinforce her improvement, identify future obstacles to her success, and hold her accountable for the job expected of her.

My employee was hired without the skills necessary for her position. Her performance is therefore unsatisfactory. I will be proposing her dismissal. Is there any point in referring her to the EAP since no amount of EAP help will salvage her?

Assuming you are bringing the performance problems to your employee's attention, it is appropriate to recommend using the EAP. Your employee has not resigned. This means your employee does not agree with your assessment, is not aware of your assessment, or is facing the crisis of sudden job loss or perhaps not having other job options. The personal distress of losing a job would by itself justify her use of the EAP. When an employee experiences performance problems, do not make an EAP referral dependent upon whether it benefits the employee or the organization—just refer the employee. This way, you have acted responsibly in accordance with your EAP's policy and can be sure that you took every measure available if dismissal becomes necessary.

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.

