



SUPERVISOR notes

A Newsletter of Personnel Management Ideas

June 2002

Employee Assistance Program 278-5018
 Christopher Knight, EAP Director
 eap@csus.edu
 www.csus.edu/eapprogr

In This Issue:

**Staff irate after performance evaluations
 An employee with a negative attitude**

**When not to prescribe "anger management" classes
 When your employee complains to your supervisor**

- My employees are frequently irate, and nearly rebellious, at the outcome of their performance evaluations each year. I dread this annual duty so much that sometimes I even find ways to skip doing it. How can I minimize their reaction?

Unfortunately, the simple advise to "grade as fairly as possible" does not guarantee that employees will accept their performance evaluations. Employees who work very closely with each other are more likely to be upset over performance evaluations when they are dissimilar. They believe they have an accurate perception of their own work quality and that of their peers. Frequent communication with the supervisor is essential to ensure that annual evaluations are less of a surprise. Consider meeting briefly and privately with each of your employees four times a year (including the annual performance review). Be specific. Ask the employee for a self-evaluation. Then provide your feedback and judgment of his or her work. Justify your ratings if you disagree. This process improves your relationship with each employee and reduces conflict at the final evaluation.

- My employee frightened coworkers by "blowing up" over a small matter. I made an EAP referral and told him to enroll in anger management counseling. It's easy to see that this is the problem, so why can't I insist on it?

Although it appears your employee could use help learning to manage his anger, his outburst is not definitive evidence for this conclusion. There are many alternative explanations for the outburst you witnessed. Only some of these explanations require intervention or professional help. Your demand that he obtain anger management counseling is beyond your role as a supervisor. However, referring your employee to the EAP is an appropriate step. When supervisors take it upon themselves to direct employees toward specific treatments for personal problems, they risk making matters worse because of incomplete or inaccurate

diagnoses. Alcohol hangover, depression, drug withdrawal, chronic pain or any of a large number of other disorders or personal stressors may have caused your employee's irritability? For many of these problems, anger management counseling alone will be completely ineffective.

-
- **After many years, I have decided to confront my employee's attitude and work problems. Frankly, I'm losing the battle. He always has a defensive response to any confrontation. How do I make progress in dealing with this behavior?**

The length of time the problem behavior has been allowed to continue contributes to the difficulty of getting it to stop. Although some supervisors briefly seek guidance from EA professionals before making a referral, more help is probably called for in this case. Ongoing consultative help from the EAP may help you remain focused and effective in what could be a long-term project to assist your employee. Many supervisors misunderstand the purpose of the EAP, thinking it is a service only for troubled employees. When supervisors themselves face conflict and supervision problems they are just as entitled to EAP services as any other employee. The EA professional will not tell you what to do or take responsibility for your decisions, but will help you clarify options, deal with ambivalence associated with conflict, and help you feel empowered to make effective decisions.

-
- **My employee wants to complain to my supervisor about a decision I made. Should I encourage him, talk him out of it, or what? How do I keep my credibility from being undermined if my supervisor reverses my decision?**

Trying to prevent your employee from speaking with your supervisor will likely compound your problem. You should speak to your supervisor immediately to provide your point of view on the disagreement and the employee's complaint about it. Ask that your supervisor discuss the complaint with you after meeting with your employee and before any response is offered. This is an important demonstration of support for you, even if your supervisor ultimately reverses your decision. Even if your decision was problematic and your supervisor is inclined to reverse it, request that you assume responsibility for delivering this message to your employee. If your supervisor makes the announcement in your absence, your credibility will be undermined. If your supervisor can't support your decision, at least you are in control of the message and have the option of changing your position based upon the merits of the argument.

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.