



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Question: I'm a nice guy, and I am sure I have a reputation for avoiding conflict. I am also a new supervisor. So far things are going well, but do you think problems are just around the corner for me as a result of my easygoing style?

Answer: Although you are a nice and easygoing guy, without assertiveness skills and a willingness to confront problems, you will eventually be seen as weak by your employees and management. Sadly, the fact is that there are employees who are poor performers, have conduct problems, or exhibit behavior that is hazardous to others and the workplace. If you are not able to respond constructively to these employees, you will acquire a reputation for tolerating difficult employees at the expense of the organization and to the distress of hardworking, valuable employees. Predictably, by being too nice, you will lose your best employees, experience turnover, have more employee conflicts and absenteeism, watch employees socialize while you take more work home, and lose control over the productivity of your work unit. Consider contacting the EAP to learn more about assertiveness skills.

Question: Can you provide a simple outline for writing a corrective letter? The last one I wrote showed my frustration and anger, but wasn't very useful in documenting my employee's performance problems.

Answer: Corrective letters help employees improve performance as well as provide documentation of the problem and required actions. The following outline supports both these purposes: (1) Description of the performance problem. (2) Statement regarding past discussions or warnings about the performance problem. (3) Statement of undesirable effects the performance problem or behavior has on the organization. (4) Statement of changes required in performance and when changes are expected. (5) Possible consequences for failure to make performance changes. (6) Statement of support for what is valued about employee's performance or abilities. (7) Plan of action for follow up by supervisor. (8) Statement thanking employee for attention to matters addressed in the letter. (9) Statement inviting employee to speak to you if clarification is needed regarding any part of the letter.

Question: My employee used to take initiative and was an outstanding performer, but in the past year she has become an average performer. What role can the EAP play in this situation?

Answer: Your employee's performance might register as satisfactory on a formal review, but still not be consistent with her potential. This can be described and documented. Although you may not be justified in taking an administrative action, you have a reason to make use of the EAP. Consider asking your employee why her performance has changed so dramatically over the past year. Remember, this is not playing the role of an armchair diagnostician. Your employee may offer a personal problem as an explanation. At that point, you could encourage use of the EAP to deal with it.

Question: Sometimes I discover in the middle of a corrective interview that I am responsible for the performance problem of an employee. It might be due to lack of communication, faulty instructions, or lack of follow-up. Won't I lose respect if I apologize or admit it?

Answer: Few things are harder than admitting fault, particularly in the middle of a corrective interview. But experienced managers know that no one was ever despised for admitting their mistakes. It is worse for your employee to walk away feeling unfairly corrected. Willingness to be open to admitting your own contribution to a problem can gain you respect and help your employee admit to his or her own role in the performance problem. It is a good practice when correcting performance to always ask yourself ahead of time whether you have some ownership in the problem. You might prevent the need for a corrective interview (something most supervisors do not like) or prevent having to discover your own role in the middle of the discussion.

Question: Some of my employees are more productive than others. Assuming none of them have personal problems interfering with their productivity, what explains differences in motivation? What is my role in helping them be as productive as possible?

Answer: Employee motivation is a broad subject of study. Two employees equally capable of producing the same amount of work may respond to different motivators. One employee may be internally motivated by the rewards of success in accomplishing goals, while another employee may accomplish the same goals, but motivated by fear of failure. Most employees have a balance of these two motivational tracks, but favor one over the other. Manager supervision style may favor one of these employee types over the other, but finding a balance of both is ideal. Examining your management style (whether it is reward and praise oriented, or consequence and discipline oriented) can give clues to improvements in helping motivate your employees. If you struggle with difficulties in changing your style, the EAP may be able to help you discover why and find resources to support your goal of personal balance and change.

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.

