



SUPERVISOR NOTES

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

August 2001

Employee Assistance Program 278-5018
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In This Issue: **Addressing an “attitude problem”** **EAP referral vs corrective action**
 Talking to a depressed employee **Is my communication style a problem?**

- **I have postponed addressing my employee’s attitude problem for many years. I admit that not confronting her has made the problem worse. Is it possible to confront her and expect changes after such a long period of time?**

Although it will be difficult to step in suddenly to intervene with your employee’s behavior, it is possible. Begin by considering exactly what behaviors you want changed. Write them down and assign a degree of importance to each. A bad attitude can mean many things, so clearly define what behaviors constitute a bad attitude. Just as important, define their cost to the organization. Do they cause morale problems? Lost productivity? Work errors? Conflicts with coworkers or students? Hold a corrective interview and discuss the changes you want. Provide the rationale for change, but be candid with your employee if she asks why you are suddenly requiring her to change. Explain how you’ve postponed confronting her, but that your priorities have now made the changes in her conduct paramount. Do not ignore any future behavior problems, or you will reinforce her problematic behavior. Be sure to praise her for any progress you see.

- **I believe in the value of EAPs, but not so much in supervisor referrals. If someone can’t perform, I’ll initiate corrective actions. If an employee visits the EAP, great, but that’s their decision. Why isn’t this a common sense approach to employee problems?**

Organizations that establish EAPs recognize that not every personal problem that interferes with job performance will be amenable to the self-diagnosis and the self-motivation you expect of employees. Indeed, employees with certain medical or psychological conditions may slowly deteriorate in their ability to perform over many years, but have no clue as to what contributes to their work problems. In such instances, blaming others and denial are natural ways of dealing with reality. These employees could be your best performers if their personal problems were identified and effectively treated. Many such personal problems are very treatable. The simple step of making a supervisor

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- **My employee is obviously depressed. I know what depression looks like because it runs in my family. I feel obligated to help, but how can I do so without saying to her that she looks depressed? I am watching her get worse.**

referral based upon performance problems is all it may take. Helping your organization preserve its resources, and reducing the headaches of low productivity or turnover, are clear reasons for using your EAP as a management resource.

Avoid discussing depression and instead focus on performance issues that affect productivity or service. Can you see that she avoids customers, makes mistakes, or is forgetful? Is she slow to complete assignments, or are there absenteeism or tardiness problems? If so, be supportive but raise these issues with her as the reasons for making a referral to the EAP. It is okay to tell your employee what you observe. This can be more effective in motivating her to visit the EAP than discussing with her your impressions about her apparent depression. Employees may deny their depression, but not deny their performance issues, making follow-through with an EAP referral more likely. Ask her what causes her apparent inability to complete assignments, apparent sadness, or loss of excitement for her work. These are not diagnostic questions, but may produce from her a personal explanation that supports the performance issues for the referral.

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- **I have a habit of firmly shaking my finger to make a point when I am angry or trying to be assertive in a conversation. I don't intend to be intimidating, so what is the problem with such a non-verbal gesture?**

Interpreting non-verbal behavior or gestures is part of the human experience. When you wave or shake your finger at employees, they may interpret the gesture as intimidating. Although you may not intend to intimidate or frighten your employees, the effect of your behavior is what counts. This is also an underlying principle in sexual harassment: the effect of the sexually related behavior on the recipient (the employee's perception) helps define whether it is harassment. Certainly employees may perceive your finger shaking differently. Some may find it mildly irritating, while others may freeze in their tracks as if scolded by a parent. If employees are complaining about this gesture, they are telling you what it means to them. Rather than getting your point, your employees may feel intimidated into accepting your point of view.

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.