



# SUPERVISOR NOTES

NE S E T T E O P E S O N N E N E E N T I E S

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**In This Issue:**    **Managing work team conflict**                      **Consulting with EAP about disciplinary actions**  
    **Transition period for new managers**    **Absenteeism and EAP referral**

- **Our team members have such strong personalities that they stay in almost constant conflict. Team meetings focus on practical matters, but we often avoid topics that might lead to flaring emotions. I'm afraid team conflict and the avoidance of conflictual topics may interfere with our team performance. How can we begin to address this problem?**

Conflict within a work team is normal, even essential. Unmanaged conflict can become destructive, however. Without a structure for managing conflict, you run the risk of uncivil behavior. Try the following: Divide your team meeting into two parts. Part one should focus on practical matters — project planning, decision making, procedures, etc. The second half should focus on: 1) identifying coworker/management communication issues that interfere with the team; 2) role expectations and role conflicts; and 3) other organizational issues that interfere with team functioning. Such a meeting may spark fireworks in the beginning, and you may need extra time. EAP consultation or meeting facilitation may be useful at this point. Eventually, the intensity and frequency of conflict will subside. Get everyone to agree on three rules. Rule #1: Engage management to hold the team accountable for effective relationships. Rule #2: Keep conflict inside the group. No venting or seeking validation outside the team. Rule #3: Start each meeting with a short discussion about what's working well.

- **I consulted with an EAP professional before deciding that a disciplinary action against my employee would be appropriate. Should I tell the employee that the EAP supports the disciplinary action?**

Although you received management consultation services and subsequently decided to take a disciplinary action, the EAP does not play a role in endorsing or disapproving of your decision. Violating this principle will erode the organization's trust in the EAP's objective, problem-solving role. It is essential that the EAP and management keep their roles distinct. Endorsing your decision would align the EAP with the disciplinary action. Opposing your decision would likewise undermine your ability to manage effectively. The usefulness of the EAP depends on maintaining a neutral position between non-supervisory and supervisory employees.

You are the manager; own your decision. To do otherwise will alter the perception of EAP neutrality and undermine EAP credibility. This could damage the EAP and its value, making it less attractive and less effective.

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- **I am a newly hired manager overseeing a large group of employees. In many ways I am the opposite of the last supervisor, although we both have good reputations. What must I do in order to help employees adapt to my style?**

Being consistent and predictable are the most important skills you will need to practice as a new manager. When leadership changes, employees pass through an adaptive period when they must learn the style and expectations of the new supervisor. Although you will need to be sensitive to the work culture, you were not hired to mimic the style of the last manager. Ultimately, employees will have to adapt to your style. Helping them be successful will depend on your ability to define your style early and communicate your expectations. You must then practice consistency and predictability to shorten the adaptation period. Some employees may be unable to change or meet your expectations. As a result, conflicts may emerge. You should examine these conflicts for new lessons or improvements you can make in how you manage people. The EAP can assist you. Ultimately, some employees may depart, but supervisor openness to effective changes can usually reduce the number of departures.

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- **My employee has severe absenteeism problems that have affected morale. He has good skills, but his coworkers are complaining. I feel a lot of pressure to terminate him. I fear using the EAP because this might delay his departure.**

Absenteeism problems are highly amenable to EAP intervention, particularly when you see evidence of your employee's skills and abilities. For this reason alone, you should consider using the EAP. Experience shows that the employee and your organization will be better off if you make the referral. You would be feeling less pressure now if you had referred earlier when the attendance problems first emerged, but do not allow this misstep to dissuade you from referral now. You will probably see improvement in his attendance pattern after you make the supervisor referral. Act to support your employee when the pattern of absenteeism stops, or follow through with your next step when or if the attendance pattern recurs.

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

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.