



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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- > The potential effects of budget cuts
- > Referring to the EAP for performance problems
- > Angry employees who want to walk off the job
- > Resistance to change

Question: I have an employee who says she suffers from depression. She called to ask for time off to see a doctor. I left a message and asked her to reschedule because it was inconvenient, but she never called back and never showed up. Isn't this an indication she isn't sick?

Answer: Although you are frustrated with your employee's failure to communicate with you, and are therefore naturally suspicious about her absence, do not assume she is untruthful. An employee with major depression or another illness with depressive symptoms may experience lethargy so severe that aversion to activity may include not communicating with you. Your employee may care about her job and job security but her condition may leave her without the mental capacity to demonstrate it. You should respond to her performance problems or attendance issues as you would other employees, keeping in mind policies of your organization and laws regarding ill or injured employees, but do not act on unsubstantiated suspicions. It is common for supervisors to guess at the hidden meaning of certain employee behaviors. However, this diagnostic step is hazardous and should be avoided because it can expose supervisors to charges of discrimination or other unfair treatment if it influences inappropriate responses to troubled employees.

Question: Our organization has faced many financial cutbacks, and employees are doubling up on work. Should I refer employees who appear tired and overworked even if they are not troubled with performance problems?

Answer: What are you seeing or hearing that helps you make the determination that employees are tired and overworked? Are some employees irritable? Have interpersonal conflicts increased? Do negative attitudes and verbal complaints diminish morale? Is there more absenteeism? Any of these continuing performance issues may indicate the need for a supervisor referral. So it is conceivable to have troubled employees, even if there were none before the financial cutbacks. If the cutbacks are permanent, and the organization's expectations for productivity have changed for good, you will need to be concerned with helping your employees accept the new standard and its accompanying performance expectations. Some employees may not be able to adjust as quickly as others, and will need more support. Do not hesitate to use the EAP to support your team by suggesting they use the EAP.

Question: How long after a corrective interview can I make a referral of an employee to the EAP? I forgot to mention the EAP when I met with my employee recently. It has now been about two weeks since the meeting.

Answer: There is no reason why you cannot incorporate the EAP now. Even if performance problems no longer exist, you can remind the employee about the EAP's services and welcome the employee to make use of the services. Since the urgency of the original corrective interview has passed, you can expect that the employee will be less likely to follow through with your suggestion. Still, your employee deserves to know about opportunities available to help improve performance. Presumably you have taken steps to follow up with your employee to discuss improvements in performance. This is also a good time to remind your employee about the EAP.

Question: My employee walks off the job when she gets angry with coworkers or is frustrated by small office conflicts. It's my fault because I permitted it one time so she could calm down, but she's taken it as permission to do it repeatedly. How do I intervene?

Answer: The goal of helping your employee find a way to calm down is a good one, but walking off the job permits her to avoid work. This may explain the appeal of leaving the job site. In other words, the problematic behavior is self-reinforcing. You can expect different behavior. Meet with your employee to establish a different expectation for managing interpersonal stress. Let her know that walking off the job is no longer acceptable because it interferes with productivity, and that you expect her to cooperate with fellow workers and manage difficulties in the office while remaining on the job site. Recommend that she consider using the EAP to find other ways to manage her feelings.

Question: I am a new manager and need to make changes within the work group. I am getting a lot of resistance, although I clearly explained the need for change. I know people naturally resist change, but why?

Answer: There is a natural tendency for people to resist changes, both small and large. Once human beings adapt to their environment and have a predictable role within it, change will threaten valued attributes or basic human needs met by the status quo (the way things are). These include feeling in control, security, comfort, prestige, self-esteem, satisfactory relationships, and more. Although the changes you wish to implement are needed or valuable, resistance almost always occurs. Keys to making work unit or organizational change easier: anticipate employees' concerns; share your vision; involve employees in decisions whenever possible; let employees express their feelings; answer questions completely; think ahead about problems employees may have with change; maintain an "open door" policy; and, emphasize the benefits change will bring.

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.

