



SUPERVISOR notes

A Newsletter of Personnel Management Ideas

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Employee Assistance Program 278-5018
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- For years, my employee has rejected my accounts of her performance problems. She dismisses my documentation as not factual. Discussions typically include convincing her that past discussions have actually occurred. What can I do?

It is not uncommon for employees to deny that discussions about performance took place, particularly if long periods of time have passed since their occurrence. Although your documentation may be accurate, but disputed, you may need to use it anyway to support any adverse action you propose. Obviously you are frustrated at not getting agreement from your employee that the performance pattern exists. You may never be successful at this task, but establishing a reciprocating documentation plan can help. Give your employee a copy of your documentation or a corrective letter and invite her to respond in writing, agreeing to it, or rejecting it with her own written account. This slowly builds a more effective record of your attempts to correct performance and ends the verbal "confront-deny" pattern. You may get the performance changes you seek because the argument no longer controls the supervision relationship.

- Periodically, employees take leave for extended periods of time to help family members with medical problems. We have not referred such employees to the EAP, but should we consider doing so?

Taking leave solely to assist family members with health problems would not justify a supervisor referral, but reminding employees about the EAP as a supportive resource would be a good idea. Be careful to tell your employee that the recommendation is only meant to be helpful — employees who take time off for extended periods are often anxious about how they are perceived by others at work. Many health care problems are so demanding of the patient and family members that certain resources may be necessary to manage employee stress and the patient's

health care delivery needs. Frequently the EAP can find resources, many unique, that assist employees in their caregiver responsibilities. Some of these services would not be easily discovered without assistance from the EAP.

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- **If supervisors are not supposed to diagnose alcohol- or drug-addicted employees, why are signs and symptoms of an employee with a possible alcohol or other drug problem, like alcohol on the breath, included in supervisor training?**

Supervisors are provided with common performance-related signs and symptoms that could be associated with many personal problems. The more comprehensive the list of performance problems, the better. Clinical symptoms that professionals use to diagnose chemical dependency are not provided to supervisors. Some performance symptoms may be more common among employees with alcohol or other drug problems, but are not diagnostic. Alcohol on the breath may be a performance issue upon which to base a supervisor referral, but it alone has little diagnostic value. Training supervisors helps them avoid natural inclinations to focus on images, myths, or stereotypes of addicted persons. When the shift is made to focusing on performance problems, more employees who have alcohol or other drug dependencies get referred.

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- **My employee and I differ on how he should be doing his job. We've known each other a long time, but recently seem to be in continual conflict. Would it be a good idea to have the EAP mediate our conflict?**

You should examine the nature of your conflict with your employee before engaging in a mediation process. Some supervisors feel hesitant about asserting themselves with employees they know well because it feels awkward and antagonistic to their long-term and familiar relationship. They would like to avoid feeling as though they are "pulling rank." They are unaware that their employee's behavior has placed them in this position, so they struggle with a way to get the job done without upsetting their employee. You have a right to expect work duties to be performed in ways you judge effective. Although mediation is useful in workplace relationships, in some cases it can send a message that changes are optional for the supervised employee. Work with the EAP to understand your role, this relationship, and the most appropriate options for resolving conflict. You may decide that mediation is not appropriate.

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.