



# SUPERVISOR NOTES

September 2004

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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## Retirement Announcement

*The current EAP director, Christopher Knight, will retire at the end of this year. He will be greatly missed by his staff and the university community. A search for a new director is underway, and it is expected the new person will be appointed at the beginning of January, 2005.*

## In This Issue:

- > When employees complain
- > Addressing a drinking problem
- > Giving performance evaluations
- > Low employee morale

**Question: I supervise a lot of employees. I don't have time to listen to all the interpersonal and relationship squabbles and problems they experience. Would it be better to refer complainers to the EAP, and not get involved in any of it?**

Answer: Although the EAP is capable of helping employees troubled by on-the-job relationship problems and conflicts, it can't substitute for your role as a manager in the problem-solving process. When you proactively manage employees, you identify and intervene with inappropriate and offensive behavior, reduce behavioral risk to the organization, and use your authority to influence standards of behavior needed to conform with performance expectations. When you don't get involved in managing employee conflict, you fail to use your authority constructively, and therefore problems grow worse. Employees have a strong need to interact with a supervisor concerning their on-the-job difficulties. This includes "venting" concerns and gaining assurances that the supervisor is a partner in resolving a problem. Only a supervisor can make decisions, offer these assurances, and make commitments that might be necessary to help resolve issues presented by employees. If you have having trouble with this aspect of your supervisory role, consult with your EAP.

**Question: I have an employee with a drinking problem. I know it because, frankly, I may have a bit of a drinking problem. My drinking doesn't get in the way of my work; however, his does. The problem is how to refer my employee to the EAP without him confronting me.**

Answer: Referring your employee to the EAP does not entail discussing his personal problems, so you should not raise the alcohol issue. Instead, focus on his performance issues. Many supervisors mistakenly believe that they must offer the employee a diagnostic explanation to justify a referral to the EAP, in addition to the documented job performance problems. Although most supervisors have an idea or can guess the nature of an employee's personal problems, mentioning them is a tactical error in supervisor referrals. Convincing your employee that the personal problem exists then overshadows the performance issue. You can always consult with the EAP and ask for guidance on what to say to your employee and how to say it. The EAP can also give you more information, if you desire it, on alcohol use and related health problems for your benefit.

**Question: My boss is questioning the poor performance evaluation I gave to my employee because past evaluations have been excellent under other supervisors. She says I have personal issues that interfere with my supervisory skills. Can the EAP help me?**

Answer: You should meet with your supervisor to discuss her concerns about your management style. Write down, or obtain in writing, the specific issues that concern her. Then meet with the EAP. Together, you and the EA professional can explore the concerns that your supervisor has raised. It is certainly possible that the performance of your employee is different now than it was under past supervisors. If so, the EAP can help you consider more effective and objective ways of documenting your observations. It is also possible that you and your supervisor are both correct. She may have legitimate concerns about your management style, but your employee may also have performance problems. The EAP can help you sort out the issues and find strategies for dealing with each.

**Question: Some employees seem to have morale problems. My problem is that "poor morale" is a hard thing to document or describe. Is poor morale something upon which I can base an EAP referral, or is it a symptom of something else?**

Answer: Morale is an emotional condition of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty of an individual or group. With this definition of morale, it may be something you can't quickly or easily measure. Poor morale affects performance, and it is undesirable. You are right, however, it is an issue you can't easily label as a duty, responsibility, or "essential function." You should be concerned about employee morale, but it will be easier if you determine what behaviors demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence in the work organization, and loyalty to the work unit or organization (or a lack of these behaviors). Use these measures to intervene and, if necessary, suggest your employees visit the EAP. As you endeavor to ensure that individual employees feel good about their jobs, you may discover issues within the work environment over which you have control that also affect morale. Don't overlook interventions that may resolve them. Your EAP can help you come up with interventions that may be helpful.

***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.

