



SUPERVISOR NOTES

December 2004

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Retirement party for Chris Knight! Help us say farewell to the current EAP director, Chris Knight, on Wednesday, December 15th, at 5 pm in the lobby of the Student Health Center. Questions? Call the EAP office at 278-5018.

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Question: I heard that my employee is going through a "rough time at home" and that she called the EAP. Her job performance is fine, but I want to ask what's going on. Perhaps I can assist her. I don't want her, and others, to think that I don't care.

Answer: If you know your employee well, you may feel the need to inquire about her personal problems on the basis of hearsay. Still, your employee has not shared her personal problems with you, and you should assume she does not want to do so now. What explains your need to ask her about her problems, especially if she is working with the EAP? Do you want to demonstrate support, or do you feel overlooked or rejected that she told others about her problems, but not you? Employees usually recognize supervisors as representatives of the employer with whom they have a dependent financial relationship, not as confidants with whom they wish to share personal problems. You can remain detached from the personal lives of your employees and still be a concerned and supportive supervisor. To ignore this boundary can cause you to be a less effective supervisor because you have chosen to incorporate personal issues in your relationship with the employee.

Question: Our work unit will be experiencing tremendous stress next year as we accomplish tough production goals. I hope employees use the EAP, but what can I personally do if I can't be a counselor?

Answer: Although EAPs play a key role in helping employees manage stress, supervisors and managers can also help in significant ways. During stressful periods, stay attuned to ways that can improve communication between you and employees. If teamwork is important, consider ways to permit more opportunity for employees to support each other. Research has shown a powerful link between coworker support and improved stress management—more so than any other stress reduction technique. Stress reduction can also be accomplished by redesigning jobs, changing the relationships between employees and those with authority and responsibility, modifying work schedules, making changes in evaluation and reward systems, and matching individual abilities with job requirements. Some of these alterations can be accomplished before things get stressful. Consider a meeting with employees to help them plan in anticipation of the stressful period. This may preempt the negative effects of stress.

Question: Do employees ever refer themselves to the EAP for help with alcoholism, or are denial and the nature of the illness such that an organization will face an eventual crisis or incident that leads someone in the person's life to intervene?

Answer: A crisis that prompts an intervention from a friend or family member aren't the only ways people get help for alcoholism or drug addiction. Other events in the addicted employee's life can, and do, lead to self-referrals to the EAP. As addiction worsens, performance problems may emerge, but personal problems outside of the workplace have usually existed for a longer period of time. These may include marital conflict, legal problems, or family problems, among others. A crisis associated with these problems may prompt a self-referral. The degree to which the EAP is promoted as confidential, and the extent to which employees feel confident that they will not incur negative repercussions for admitting to personal problems and using the EAP, directly influence whether employees with addiction problems will self-refer.

Question: My employee and I are not getting along, but maybe it's not her fault. Maybe I am too overbearing and this causes problems. Some say I am too controlling, but how can I tell for sure? What behaviors would indicate that I need to "let go" a little bit?

Answer: Give yourself a hand for being willing to examine your supervisory practices and discover what improvements will make you a more effective and balanced supervisor. To determine if you are "over-supervising," ask yourself whether you too often tell your employee how to handle the details of her work. After delegating assignments, do you feel the irresistible urge to take them back the moment your employee runs into a problem? Do you continually provide "one last piece of advice" because of fear that the end product of an assignment won't be exactly as you envision it? After delegating an assignment, do you too frequently check to see "how it's going?" When your employee runs into a problem, do you rarely ask, "What do you think you should do?" If you struggle with making the changes you want in your supervision style, consider talking to the EAP.

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

