



# SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

## Employee Assistance Program

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**Question:** How successful can an EAP be with an employee who appears so egotistical and in denial about the nature of his or her personal problems?

**Answer:** Employee assistance professionals specialize in interviewing techniques designed to help resistant employees gain interest in the counseling process to resolve personal problems. One of these interviewing techniques is called “motivational counseling.” Both an art and science, it is a topic of extensive study within the helping professions. Most counselors understand some principles of motivational counseling, but employee assistance professionals specialize in these practice techniques. Motivational counseling and assessment techniques seek to uncover the nature of a personal problem that explains an employee’s performance issues, but also the path toward motivating the employee to resolve the problem based upon his or her healthy self-interest. Motivational counseling techniques are not always successful, of course, but their success has spurred the growth of EAPs for 30 years.

**Question:** . My employee has an attendance problem and brings doctor’s notes to explain his absences. Frankly, I think they are fakes. Can I call the doctor’s office and verify their authenticity? And, if they are falsified, should I suggest the employee go to the EAP?

**Answer:** You should first discuss this situation with your human resources advisor. He or she will guide you in what to do based upon the extent of the absenteeism problem, past precedents the organization has established, and procedures it uses for verification of medical certifications. Several important federal laws govern medical and personal privacy, and they must be considered in the process of dealing with medical matters. You can certainly suggest that your employee make use of the EAP to address whatever might be causing the attendance problem. You don’t have to wait. The attendance pattern is burdensome for your department. The EAP is also available as a consultant to you in working to resolve the attendance problem.

**Question: Of my supervisor duties, the one I dislike most is confronting employees with performance problems. Defensiveness seems to be one thing I can always count on from employees. Do you have any tips on reducing defensiveness in confrontations?**

**Answer:** Because defensiveness can be a potential challenge in any corrective interview, supervisors must use “tools” to make interviews less difficult. These tools are associated with language and attitude. For example, one helpful tip is called the “help me understand” approach. Use “help me understand” statements to set a positive, non-threatening tone when confronting employees. Example: “Help me understand what to conclude when you commit to telling the truth about filing your activity reports and then we identify serious discrepancies.” Your attitude toward the employee is also an important tool. If you are convinced a confrontation will fail to produce a positive result, it will show from the moment you speak. An employee should never be able to tell from your attitude that you have lost faith in his or her ability to bounce back.

**Question: My employee is teased and picked on by coworkers, but I think all of us agree that he is well liked. He accepts it, and goes along with the teasing, however, I am a bit worried because sometimes I think it goes too far. Should I be concerned?**

**Answer:** The important part of your description of this problem is your belief that the teasing goes too far. Would you allow yourself to be treated by others in the same way? If not, you can conclude that your employee is the victim of harassment, and therefore you know or should know it is offensive. Although supervisors generally rely upon employees coming forward and complaining about the way they are treated, some employees will not. Your good judgment is telling you that something is wrong, and you should intervene to curtail the inappropriate behavior. Although your employee does not complain and appears accepting of his role as the brunt of others teasing and jokes, you cannot assume that he is not adversely affected by it and that he does not harbor anger and resentment toward you and his coworkers. In the extreme, this could lead to an incident of workplace violence that could have been prevented.

**Question: I know employees are angry about having no pay raises this year. As a result, I hesitate to praise them for a good job because I fear they will shrug it off in anger or reject it. What should I do, praise employees or stay away from them?**

**Answer:** Naturally, you feel bad about employees not getting the financial compensation they deserve, but demonstrating your appreciation in any way practical is a good idea, no matter what reaction you get. It is possible that an employee will take advantage of it and reject your attempt to point out his or her good work, but others will appreciate it. Praising employees never made morale worse. Although hard to believe, money plays less of a role in why employees quit a job. Instead, not feeling appreciated is the number one reason they leave according to the U.S. Department of Labor. So, not demonstrating appreciation will compound the problems you face.

*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.