



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Q. Referring an employee to the EAP because of severe conduct problems is straightforward. My concern is how I approach an employee who appears disturbed or agitated on the job.

A. Many supervisors share your concern, but planning the steps you would take in a situation where an employee appears upset or agitated can help you feel better prepared if it happens. The University does not want you to place yourself at risk, so consider if you need help from another manager, or even the police in an unusual situation. Some troubled employees may exhibit unusual behaviors that are not threatening, such as talking strangely, appearing confused or disoriented, or crying. Enlisting another manager to help you approach an employee can be helpful. This reduces defensiveness, and you gain the benefit of having a reliable witness in case one is needed later. Guiding the employee to a private office or work space away from others or an unsafe environment is a good first step. Gently encourage the employee to accompany you and your colleague; don't grab the person's hand or otherwise risk antagonizing him or her. Speak gently but firmly, staying focused on the behaviors the employee is exhibiting. Allow the employee time to talk and show you are interested in what they have to say. Offer the EAP as a resource for them and offer to call to set up the appointment if they are receptive.

The Employee Assistance Program will be open throughout the semester break. We will be closed beginning Monday, December 24th, 2007 and will reopen Wednesday, January 2nd, 2008. We will maintain our regular hours of 8 AM until 5 PM during the semester break. We wish everyone a very happy holiday season.

Q. My employee does not like her job, but she is good at it. I don't have another position for her, and she doesn't want to quit. Her morale is not very good. Sometimes her attitude is poor. Is there a way to help her feel more joy in her position?

A. There are several things that you can do that might help your employee. Try helping her set goals during the coming year so she can look forward to some meaningful accomplishments. Find ways of rewarding her for steps along the way. Come up with different things that she can do voluntarily on her breaks, if she likes, that will allow her to gain new skills and abilities. Give her more responsibility in the office, not necessarily more work. More responsibility is a powerful reward for employees, sometimes better than a raise because it influences how people feel about themselves. Don't rule out a referral to the EAP if her attitude gets worse, and you may wish to suggest self-referral now. There could be a personal issue contributing to her attitude problems.

Q. I think supervisors are sometimes too worried about getting involved with the personal problems of employees. As a result, they appear impersonal and employees recognize it. This compounds problems because employees think the supervisor does not care about them. Am I right?

A. There is a difference between getting involved in an employee's personal problems and being supportive. A supervisor does not have to behave in a detached and aloof manner to keep from getting involved with the employee's issues. The challenge comes when a personal problem appears simple or understandable to the supervisor. It is then tempting to offer advice, despite unknown dimensions to the problem that might exist. The other part of this challenge comes from employees who want the supervisor involved in their problems. These employees want a different type of relationship with their supervisor—one that meets their personal needs. Supervisors should resist, as it is important for them to understand that meeting personal needs and going beyond their normal role may interfere with managing productivity later.

Q. I want to be a good role model to my employees. What are some ways of doing this that will help them be better employees and also make them more valuable to the University?

A. Be a role model to your employees in the following ways, which are typically overlooked by many supervisors: 1) Demonstrate that you have an understanding of the economics of your Department and the key issues of concern faced by the University. 2) Make decisions consistent with these issues. 3) Follow the Department's policies; never accept mediocrity, and be creative. 4) Don't let your ego get in the way of being open-minded. Ask for help and seek advice from others who have a different perspective on problems. 5) Don't be afraid to surround yourself with people smarter than you, and show that you focus on overcoming obstacles to success, not whining about them. 6) Share the success and praise that comes with accomplishments

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 one of our Employee Assistance Program professionals.