



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Q. When I meet with employees to go over their performance evaluation, what can I say to help those who receive unsatisfactory ratings to feel less hopeless and fearful about their job security without undermining their sense of urgency to improve performance?

A. A straight forward approach with your employees is usually your best tactic. The job expectations should be well recognized in advance by all so the actual performance review is not a surprise. If there have been significant concerns throughout the year then these should have also been raised, at least informally, prior to the formal evaluation. Rather than saying something for the purpose of having your employees feel better, reframe how the issues raised in the evaluation amount to a "road map" that points to exactly what needs to happen in order to arrive at the goal. With this approach, motivation to "get going" will increase, and employees will be less affected by fear and hopelessness that can rob motivation. Ask employees if they understand the concerns identified in the review. Offer the time to listen to their perspective. Clarify any assistance you can provide to assist them in improving the identified problem(s). Take the approach that you and your employee are on the "same team" working toward the same goal. This eliminates the "me vs. you" mentality so frequently found in supervision relationships. By setting clear expectations and providing honest feedback throughout the year you can make the performance review a tool for improvement.

Q. Can you provide a range of different issues and factors to consider when I am observing an employee's performance?



Q. I have several difficult employees. Each has their own way of causing problems associated with communication, productivity, morale, and interpersonal conflict. In "EAP speak", is there a difference between a difficult employee and a troubled employee?

A. Observing performance can be more complex than most supervisors realize. Proper observing of performance is more than watching out how tasks are performed. It also includes many other observation points, each of which tells a piece of the performance story. Consider some or all of these "lookout points" to produce a more complete picture of how your employee is doing: skills, abilities, motivation, quality of work produced, conduct, appearance, vitality (energy level or liveliness), attitude, eagerness to learn, availability, ethical decisions, initiative, safety consciousness, mindfulness of policies and procedures, cooperation with others, and team interaction. You'll find that annual performance evaluations are much easier when you practice good observational skills that make documentation easier to produce.

A. The word "difficult employee" has been used predominantly by journal writers, pop business columnists and management book authors, but is not as frequently seen in professional EAP literature, which prefers the term "troubled employee." Troubled employee more accurately describes the nature of the problem facing the manager—an employee performing unsatisfactorily in some way, who may have an underlying personal problem that affects quality of work, attendance, or behavior on the job. The implication with most "difficult employee" advice books (over 4000 at last count on Amazon.com) is that the difficult employee is "your problem" to solve with the advice, wit, and strategies offered by the author. Within EAP literature, the goal is to assist managers in understanding how to focus on performance and make a supervisor referral to the EAP as the most effective and least risky way to the employer of intervening with a troubled employee. That focus is on helping the employee become motivated to identify and resolve personal problems that underlie the difficult behavior that you see.

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.