



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Q. We have no financial way to provide rewards to employees as incentives. What else can be used?

Answer: Money is a motivator for many employees, but certainly not the only one. When considering incentives, remember that people will change their behavior when it will clearly benefit them to do so, based on what they value most. Many things are valued in the workplace, but the three predominant things are power, status, and popularity. In the workplace, power gives an employee control and influence over themselves or others. Status means prestige or elevated rank, and popularity means being liked or approved of. Your task is to figure out how to bring these values into the incentive mix with opportunities, duties, or job functions that match them. If you can provide employees with one or more of these three things, you will be providing powerful motivators to improve their productivity.

Q. I just referred an employee to the EAP but forgot to ask him to sign a release so I could confirm his follow-through. I also have not talked to the EAP about this. What will happen at the EAP interview? Will it be assumed that the employee is a self-referral?

Answer: The EAP will ask your employee why he decided to use the program. Your employee will likely refer to your discussion with him about using the EAP and will probably state that he is following a supervisor's referral. Any discussion that references your involvement will precipitate further discussion about the nature of the referral, and the employee will be asked to sign a release with your name on it. Although this is voluntary, most employees want their supervisors to be aware of their cooperation and will sign such a release if they have good relationships with their supervisors. Your best move now is to phone the EAP and let them know about the referral before the employee arrives. The employee decides what information is ok to release, but typically, such a release authorizes the EAP to confirm attendance and share general assessment and recommendation information only. Specifics about what the person discusses is not released.

Q. I referred my employee to the EAP and she entered treatment for a drug-use problem. I think I am entitled to know more than the EAP is telling me about what's going on with her, because I'm the one who has been helping her all along.

Answer: Major changes are coming for your employee, but they are also coming for you. One such change is a new relationship that does not include overseeing your employee's life the way you have been accustomed to doing. Shifting gears requires learning to detach. Your employee will learn to take responsibility for her own life and recovery program. She will also learn to avoid having you be responsible for her. Ask yourself if you have gained meaning from your role as the responsible person. Will you feel ignored or forgotten if the employee no longer wants you to be responsible for her? Continuing such a relationship may jeopardize your employee's recovery despite your best intentions, and treatment will include helping the employee understand this risk. The new role for you is that of a supportive supervisor who focuses on job performance.

Q. I keep the EAP's number in my desk drawer. If an employee mentions a personal problem as an excuse for poor performance, I offer them the number rather than listen to excuses. I haven't had anyone follow through yet. Is it my approach or is it employee resistance?

Answer: Although it is clear that correcting performance issues is your priority, it appears that you are not making effective use of the EAP as a management tool. The EAP service is not just for employees. It can also help you get from employees what you need: satisfactory performance. Employees who share their personal problems are not usually premeditating an excuse from accountability. They are looking for solutions. Try selling the solution more effectively, for their good and yours. True, it is inadvisable to discuss any employee's personal problems, but simply listening and being supportive can help. Discussing the EAP as a good resource rather than simply giving them the number will help employees seriously consider making the call. You'll get what you need faster, and you may help an employee resolve a personal problem of unknown risk to the University.

Q. I have an excellent relationship with each of my employees. Despite this, our workplace environment is characterized by backbiting, gossiping, cliques, and worker conflicts. We almost never meet as a group because I work better one-on-one with employees. Am I missing something?

Answer: Employees benefit from regular opportunities to process stress, manage communication, and identify group problems and solutions. Staff meetings are therefore important for maintaining good morale. Your one-on-one style is safe and effective for managing individual relationships but not for managing groups. If employees don't have regular opportunities to sit across from one another and process stress in an organized manner, you will see interpersonal conflict emerge. The more stressful and demanding the work environment, the more likely there will be conflict. (Be cautious about identifying one member of the group as the one who "creates all the problems." This is a common occurrence among supervisors in your situation. Frequently one strong personality simply gets noticed more often within a group of coworkers in conflict.) You must be willing to face your employees as a *group* as well as individually. Group meetings may not be comfortable at first, but there is no substitute for them. Seek input from the EAP on how to run an effective staff meeting.

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.