



# SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

## Employee Assistance Program

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Q. I meet with many employees and frequently correct performance. Unfortunately, I often find myself forgetting the content of many discussions so I can't be definite about what was said, negotiated, or agreed to. How can I improve my memory?

A. Improving your memory is not the answer. You have heard the expression "If it isn't in writing, it doesn't exist." This is a good philosophy for supervisors to follow and relates to the crucial art of taking contemporaneous notes. No matter how good your memory or ability to recall past events, even in exquisite detail, it's no match for the power of contemporaneous notes. Contemporaneous notes frequently prevail in disputes where one person's word is pitted against another's. They can serve to prove you right, despite their subjectivity at the time originally written, as to what actually happened or who said what. Develop the habit of routinely keeping notes on disputes, negotiations, corrective actions, and performance matters regarding your employees. Although the importance of documentation is often discussed in supervisory skills courses, the routine use of contemporaneous notes is a related skill that supervisors must also come to appreciate. Providing a written summary of discussions involving decisions or directions will also clarify communication with your employees.

Q. I don't hesitate to immediately go to employees and discuss performance issues when I see them. I often experience a lot of resistance and anger, however. I think my approach needs improvement. What are some good tips on how to approach these discussions?

Q. I sense a subtle resentment toward me by my employees regarding my role, and I've heard statements that suggest I don't do enough work. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am not very visible, but I am shocked at how naïve some of my employees appear to be.

*Call the EAP for a confidential consultation about supervisory concerns, job-related issues or personal problems.*

A. Sometimes the correction of performance must be done quickly, at other times it can be handled later. Picking an opportune time to talk with the employee is important. By not interrupting them unnecessarily in the midst of a task you convey respect for them and increase the chance they will hear your direction in a positive manner. Assume that employees want feedback; many studies show that employees don't think they get enough. However, many report frustration that the only time they receive feedback is when they "do something wrong". Your feedback may be better received if you also make frequent mention of what the employee is doing right or well. Operate on the premise that most employees hired for their positions are fully capable of doing acceptable work, so feedback and correcting performance become a partnership in communication, not a one-way attack. This mind-set includes investigating what employees think about their own performance, what guidance they are relying upon for what they decide to do, what changes you want, and your ability to explain specifically what you want the employee to do or produce. Listen to what your employee says about the situation; there may have been other circumstances you were not aware of or they may have ideas on how to better address the concerns. By focusing on a "problem that needs a solution", you can create an open dialogue about how to find the best outcome.

Management expert and author Robert J. Graham once remarked, "If they know nothing of what you are doing, they suspect that you are doing nothing." Avoid the temptation to be just an overseer or absent and mysterious person to your employees. More important, spend some time with them. What drives employee suspicion that their supervisor makes little contribution is usually a lack of communication. By sharing your activities, problems and ideas, as well as listening, you create a greater sense of "team" within your work group. You are all working towards a common goal.

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.