



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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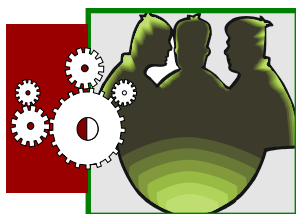
- > *Managing in Times of Uncertainty*
- > *Effective Performance Evaluations*
- > *Communication to Minimize Negativity*



I am concerned about the effect the current budget uncertainty is having on the people I supervise. I notice they seem more stressed and less enthusiastic about their jobs. All this talk of cut backs, lay offs, and furloughs is draining and creates worry. Any ideas?

We are indeed in a time of high stress and uncertainty. This creates a situation where people feel under attack and in a state of chronic alert. Over time, this can have a negative effect on people; impacting their sleep, mood, and general health. As a supervisor, you are not immune from this, but have the additional responsibility of overseeing your work group. Encourage your staff to take care of themselves. Exercise, proper nutrition, adequate sleep and a commitment to do something relaxing, recharging, or nourishing on a regular basis can be of immense help in countering the effects of chronic stress. Maintain open communication; sharing information as it becomes clear but not sharing every rumor or possibility. Everyone knows the “facts” regards the current situation are changing constantly, but by keeping your staff informed to the best of your knowledge you build trust which helps create a sense of safety. Encourage everyone to keep a short term focus, based on the facts as they are known today and what we actually have control over at this time. Focus energy on things that can be controlled as this reduces stress. Long term planning certainly has it’s place, but is often not the best use of energy when things are constantly changing as we tend to end up worrying about things we can’t control (and what does eventually transpire is frequently different from what we were worrying about anyway). Sometimes finding an answer that works for now (knowing it is only temporary) is better than looking for the “solution” to a problem. Above all, remember to also take care of yourself.

Can you provide some tips that will help me be more positive and effective in evaluating my employees' performance this year? What are some trouble spots that supervisors must be careful to avoid?



What can be done to minimize negativity in my work group? I've noticed that as the stress and uncertainty have increased, so has a general sense of apathy and resentment among the people I supervise. Any tips?

The most overlooked benefit of a performance appraisal is its potential to bring employees and their supervisor closer together as partners in maximizing the employees' productivity. View the performance appraisal as a way to help employees improve, not as something that is punitive in nature. Performance evaluation meetings are a two-way street. Employees should never be surprised by your areas of concern. Ambushing them with previously unknown complaints about their performance creates distrust. Always end meetings where you are discussing performance by providing exact instructions on how your employees can improve, and be sure they understand how to earn better ratings in areas that you've marked for improvement. Focus on successes as well as shortcomings. Be sure to praise and thank individuals for tasks that they have performed well at various times during the year. Provide ongoing feedback during the year so the appraisal is simply a formal summary of issues (both positive and problematic) that have already been discussed. Be clear of what you expect from them and allow the employee the opportunity to express their view of their own performance.

There can be many reasons for workplace negativity, but an underlying theme is often workplace communication issues between coworkers, departments, and/or management. A key intervention is bringing coworkers together to improve communication, but don't do it only when things reach crisis proportions. Meet regularly with your work group, and always ask, "Do we have any concerns among ourselves about communication?" This won't solve every negativity issue, but predictable, regular meetings where your group poses this question to itself will pack a wallop to help reduce negativity. At first, you will probably be met with silence or denial, but don't let that detour you. Share your own impressions and observations without betraying anyone's trust or identifying any single person. Reinforce any input from employees and keep a problem solving focus. You'll notice that negativity or concerns diminish over time, but don't drop the question! Make it part of your preventive maintenance.

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.