



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Q. My employee isn't insubordinate when I make a request, but there are always complaints, resistance to details, problems with timing, and criticism about my communication. After all this, the employee delivers superior performance. How can I manage this?

A. Although your employee is great with a task, you are not describing superior performance. Quarrelsome behavior interferes with orderly work flow and is therefore serious. The negative attitude and focus on problems rather than solutions can impact the entire work place culture. The effects can have repercussions that affect other employees and undermine your effectiveness. These kinds of communication patterns between supervisors and subordinates are not unusual. They can take years to develop and can become habits that are difficult to break. They are comparable to the bickering communication patterns found between spouses. The dynamics, however, are very different because it is not a relationship of equals, in spite of your employee's efforts to act like it is. Still, you may decide that the relationship is valued. Beyond requiring that the quarrelsome behavior stop, establish new rules that must be followed and that will permit orderly discussion of work issues. The requirement that your employee put concerns in writing, for example, or share them only after you are finished speaking, may impose an intervention that produces its own cure. Asking them to repeat what they have heard from you before listening to their retort is another idea. But the most important part of your strategy is looking at how you contribute to its perpetuation. Consider using the EAP for some coaching if you need further assistance.

Q. One of my employees is resigning from the company. I am glad because this person has been slow moving and under-performing for a long time. I blame myself because I adapted to the performance issues as they grew worse, rather than intervene. How can I prevent this happening in the future?



Q. Our University has developed a policy on bullying behavior. Can you provide an outline for a private corrective interview with an employee who has this problem and what steps to take?

A. The easy answer is, start earlier in confronting employees with performance issues. To help you act sooner, ask yourself what parts of your current job you dislike the most and if those things are related to employee performance issues. Do you tend to shy away from confrontation? Is it difficult for you to be assertive if you know you will face a reaction? Do you dislike dealing with angry students or employees? Do you dread meetings with your boss to explain slow completion of tasks? Do you work extra hours away from your family to catch up? Are other workers angry over the leniency you've shown? These are only a few outcomes from this type of avoidance. Some supervisors believe that if they can cope with an employee's poor performance, then nothing needs to be done about it. They forget that lower effectiveness, efficiency, and morale, along with turn over of high-performing employees, are consequences of allowing poor performers to continue. The issues snowball. Talk to your EAP to learn more and to overcome your reluctance to confront employees.

A. Documented complaints and your personal observations should accompany you to your meeting. Start by explaining what's prompted the meeting, and share what has been observed and reported. Describe the effect of the behavior on morale and productivity. If employees feel dread in anticipated interaction with the employee, let the employee know it. It could have a big impact in motivating change. Do not joke or make light of issues in this corrective interview. Doing so will undermine your outcome and perpetuate the problem behavior. State that the behavior can't continue. A bully likes to discuss others' personalities and motives. Avoid this discussion, but do ask what your employee thinks about his or her interaction with others. Be patient and listen, but focus on what the employee can do to improve interaction with coworkers. Make an EAP referral and schedule a specific date and time for a follow-up meeting. Retaliation toward coworkers in response to your meeting is bullying behavior too—expect it to not occur. Document your meeting, including your concerns, directions, and how the employee responded. Consult with HR on what constitutes appropriate documentation.

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.