



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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How can supervisors communicate more effectively to help improve job performance issues?

One key way to help employees improve job performance is by tailoring your communication to match their motivational triggers. Employees are motivated by either intrinsic values like goal achievement, doing a job well, or garnering recognition, or by extrinsic values based on conditions reflected by such statements as “If I don’t do my job well, I may not get a raise” or “If I don’t perform well, others will complain.” A combination of these factors often motivates employees, but a predominant style can usually be identified. Take time to learn what motivates your employees and you’ll improve your communication in ways that will increase their productivity. When communicating with employees, be sure to describe what changes you expect so that employees know what you want. Some employees need visual communication—a written note from you or a diagram, for example. Others need more discussion and verbal processing to grasp the results you want from them. And the simplest rule of all: Ask your employees what works best for them in communication. They’ll tell you. Be sure to provide frequent feedback, making sure you are commenting on the positives as well as any deficiencies. Often, brief acknowledgement of accomplishments is a powerful motivator for employees. Take the time to learn the optimum way to both acknowledge and also to correct each employee you supervise to maximize your effectiveness.

Do bullied employees need counseling to help them cope more assertively, or is this strictly a zero-tolerance issue requiring a swift response whenever it's discovered, like sexual harassment is?



Following a supervisor referral, I received a phone call informing me that my employee refused the EAP's recommendations (they had signed the appropriate release). I don't know what they are, but still, I think the refusal is foolish. Should I tell the employee what I think? Performance is fine, for the moment, at least.

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

Bullied employees may or may not benefit from assertiveness training, but such a need is separate from the problem a department faces with a bullying employee. Bullying should be viewed as a health and safety issue—as real as bad brakes on a delivery truck or a loose handrail on a staircase. Bullying has known health consequences, including anxiety, depression, and even posttraumatic stress disorder. People, especially young people, have committed suicide because of bullying. Responding swiftly and decisively with the employee doing the bullying is important. The message needs to be loud and clear that such behavior is not to be tolerated. The EAP has an intervention role to play in helping employees affected by bullying or in helping employees to stop their harmful relationship patterns when they are identified by administration. Not all employees who have experienced bullying require counseling, but ensuring they are aware of the resource is important and is a further reflection of your care and concern as their supervisor.

You should continue to focus on your employee's job performance. Provide support and feedback on the changes he or she makes. Identify improvements that are still needed. Refusing the EAP's recommendation may not be a good idea, but you are not able to make this determination absolutely. The employee may be genuinely concerned about the personal problem but simply not agree with the EAP's recommendation for resolving it. Ultimately the employee must decide that the recommendation fits. In the end it is the change in their behavior that is important. Sometimes employees refuse recommendations because they are absolutely certain that less painful routes to the resolution of their problems exist. This is particularly true with alcoholic employees. Abstinence and admission to treatment feel simply too extreme at the moment. Your role as supervisor is critical, as you are the one in a position to provide clear and accurate feedback about the employee's behavior. The supervisor's focus on performance and insistence that changes are permanently forthcoming may be the only way the employee is motivated to address the problem.

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.