



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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In This Issue:

- Leading staff meetings
- Employees who self-disclose EAP involvement
- Staying in your professional role
- Motivating your staff
- Preventing supervisor burnout

Question: When I lead staff meetings, I notice that people don't listen to me. They talk among themselves and don't treat me with proper respect. How can I command attention without alienating them? I don't see this happening with other leaders, and I can't determine what they do differently.

Answer: Staff will listen to you more respectfully if you apply savvy communication skills. For starters, never talk over others. If staffers talk among themselves, keep quiet. Your silence sends a message that you're going to wait until everyone's paying attention. When you're addressing your department and you suddenly notice a pocket of chitchat among the group, stop midsentence and look at the talkers until they stop. Another technique to induce people to listen to you is to build suspense. Example: Pose a dilemma and promise to resolve it at the end of the meeting. Also, use your voice well. Vary your volume and tempo so that you don't lapse into a monotone. When you're about to share critical information, experiment with the technique of speaking softly so that everyone must listen carefully to hear what you say.

Question: In a meeting, an employee was starting to criticize a peer when he paused and said, "I was told in the EAP to be more positive, so let me restate that." No one knew he had been to the EAP. It was a bit awkward, but is there any problem with this type of disclosure?

Answer: There is nothing improper about an individual disclosing participation in the EAP. In fact, some people find it helps to share the insights they gain from the EAP with their friends at work. Telling others about their EAP sessions can strengthen their commitment to follow through and change their behavior. By stating his goal of speaking more positively, an employee can reinforce what he learned from the EA professional. While it's fine for EAP participants to declare how they intend to modify their own behavior, it would be inappropriate for them to reveal what was said about others in the EAP. In the above example, the employee would be on shaky ground if he said, "I was told in the EAP that some of you are intimidated by me, so I need to lighten up."

Question: I am a recovering alcoholic, and although I have no intention of disclosing it, my employee told me he is going to Alcoholics Anonymous to “try to cut back” on his drinking. He needs medical detoxification, not just AA. Should I say anything? There are no performance issues.

Answer: No, you should not say anything to your employee. Your experience as a recovering alcoholic does not qualify you to offer unsolicited advice to him. As with any illness, assure your employee that you will provide whatever support you can during this challenging time. Praise him for going to AA, and urge him to make it a top priority. Strongly suggest that he take advantage of the services offered by the EAP. If he truly needs detoxification, then it will become clear soon enough as he works closely with other AA members, many of whom understand the role of medical support for addictive disease in the initiation of long-term, successful recovery.

Question: My boss says I need to develop better ways to motivate my staff. But I think I do a really good job of explaining what they must do and what’s at stake. Doesn’t that make me a strong motivator?

Answer: There is more to motivating employees than telling them what to do and why it matters. You also need to arouse their passion about work. That requires an awareness of their “hot buttons”—a keen understanding of what they value most. Examples include recognition, money, flexibility, job security, or freedom and independence. The only way you can identify what drives someone is to listen and learn. Chat with each of your employees to find out about their goals, aspirations, and special skills and talents that they want to apply more fully to their jobs. Be sure to ask what causes them to feel motivated. They will tell you. In the meantime, assume that enjoying personal growth in one’s work, earning sincere praise, and doing meaningful work are three core motivators for just about everyone.

Question: After five years, I’ve grown disillusioned with managing people. It’s too exasperating! Any ideas on how I can transition out of a supervisory role without taking a demotion?

Answer: Many supervisors throw up their arms from time to time with the frustrations of the job. Even the best supervisors experience “people problems” that can lead to burnout. After investing five years in your current role, however, it may be worthwhile to discover what’s driving your exasperation, so that you can assess your situation with greater clarity and perspective. The EAP can assist you in identifying the core issues that you’re facing—and what steps you can take to derive more satisfaction from supervising employees. You may learn that you’re less willing to trust people or put faith in their capacity to improve. Or you may find that you’ve lost confidence after making personnel decisions that backfired. The EAP can help you step back, analyze the factors behind your disillusionment, and take action to regain your enthusiasm—before you take drastic action and bail out.

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 your Employee Assistance Program professional.