



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Q. I suspect one of my employees is experiencing spousal abuse at home. I have seen bruises and this person often comes to work upset. Is this any of my business as a supervisor? How can I help without feeling like I am butting into the employee's personal life?

A. Your employee is demonstrating the signs of domestic abuse. From your description and experience with her, you have a strong rationale for inquiring whether help is needed and telling your employee why you are concerned. This is not intruding, playing the role of amateur diagnostician, or acting inappropriately. Responsible authorities on the subject of domestic violence encourage involvement by others and admonish those who remain silent in the face of obvious symptoms of abuse. Be assertive in using available resources to motivate this person to get help. Focus on your message of concern, based on the observations you indicate. If abuse is denied, don't argue; stay focused on the fact she often comes to work upset. This alone is cause for concern and gives a rationale for suggesting she talk with EAP, her doctor, or an outside professional. Acknowledging domestic violence is a difficult step for many people and they may deny the obvious until they have built a level of trust with someone. By addressing your concerns now, you are moving them closer to seeking help.



Q.
I called my employee "narcissistic" in a corrective letter because it describes the behavior that I and others witness. I think this word is not diagnostic, just descriptive. Am I wrong? Will it cause problems in my documentation?

A. There are many health-related terms that have found their way into everyday language. It is easy to forget that these words usually imply diagnostic labeling. They fail to sufficiently describe behavior, and therefore are inappropriate for documentation. They can undermine administrative or disciplinary actions. Words like antisocial, neurotic, or depressive may be familiar terms used in conversations with others, but they will interfere with your goal of correcting performance. They may also invoke considerations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Human Resources is likely to reject your documentation if it includes this type of language. If your employee inflates his or her accomplishments, or fails to consider the needs of others, devalues others' contributions, or is often inappropriate and boastful, then say so. Support statements like these with examples. When you find yourself making a judgment about an employee's behavior, say to yourself, "By this I mean _____." This will reduce your tendency to use labels, and instead discover clearer descriptive terms for what you have seen, heard, or witnessed.

Q. I will be meeting with my employee to confront his tardiness. There have been five late days this month and it is unacceptable. I don't want to specify a "number" of days late as being too much because it will just encourage going to that limit. Are there any creative suggestions?

A. Every organization has its approach in dealing with and managing tardiness. Unfortunately, employees may respond and adapt to leniency shown in this area. Even some of your best, brightest and hardest-working employees will come to work late if it appears that there is no consequence for doing so. If you want to get creative, use a percentage rate in the discussion with your employee. For example, if there are 21 workdays in a specific month, and your employee is late 5 days, divide the workdays in the month into the number of late days. This will produce a "tardiness score" of 24%. Call this unacceptable. Require satisfactory attendance to be a tardiness score under 5%. Sometimes numbers like this make an impression on employees and they "get it."

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.