



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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The EAP will be open all summer offering counseling and consultation.



My employee comes to work every day in a bad frame of mind, seemingly with “a chip on the shoulder,” ready to argue or say “hmm-hmm” a lot in a cynical way. What can be done to help an employee change a “bad attitude?”

Your employee's attitude is a problem for you; however, it is a symptom of what's troubling him or her. An employee's attitude, good or bad, is based upon beliefs (past or present) concerning self, others, or the workplace. How long have you noticed this? If it represents a change for the employee, it is frequently an indicator of other problems going on in their life. Depending on the relationship you have, simply expressing concern may be a help. Suggesting they talk with EAP may be indicated. Often, a change in attitude like this reflects distress in other areas, that when addressed, results in a more positive attitude at work. If the employee has “always” been this way then it generally reflects long standing issues. Your responsibility is not to “fix” their attitude (though noticing, commenting on it, and offering assistance is) but to deal with the behavior and its impact on the work setting. If the attitude interferes with the employee's ability to perform their job, or impacts others around them, then you should address the behavior. Focus on what is expected (ex: cooperation, team work) and document your discussion. Revisit the issue with them to note their efforts. Let them know there is a connection with their attitude (if it negatively impacts the work environment) and their job performance. Your role in quantifying the problem, insisting on change, and reinforcing an improved attitude will be crucial to a successful effort. In the end, they will have to decide if they want to address the issue and develop a better attitude, or deal with the consequences of poor performance evaluations.

I dislike correcting an employee's performance and dealing with matters of discipline. I know this is a normal part of a supervisor's job description, so how do I learn to be less emotionally affected by this part of my job?



I am shocked at the number of murder-suicides in the news. Has the government, namely the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), said this is related to the economy? Besides knowing the warning signs, what can employees do to help reduce these incidents?

These types of interviews are generally not pleasant. Practice and learn a basic “model” or structure to a disciplinary (corrective) interview. One approach is to state the work standard, describe the unacceptable performance, list the facts, state the acceptable behavior and expectations, listen to the employee, answer the employee’s pertinent questions, and be sure the employee knows and understands what’s needed now. Inquire if there is anything the employee needs from you to help make the changes (for example a weekly check in to track progress or maybe training on stress management), and decide if you can/should agree to their request. Be clear about what each of you is expecting. Then wrap it up with an optimistic attitude. Caution: Don’t drag out these meetings in an effort to make them end on a happy note simply to smooth over hard feelings. This can undermine the employee’s urgency to change.

The federal government’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NIOSH, has published information on preventing violence in the workplace, but no official position based upon research documents a correlation between murder-suicide and the present economic climate. Many experts argue that there is a correlation, but mass killings also happen in the best of economic times. There are hundreds of workplace homicides every year. When notes are left by perpetrators, the common denominators are the feelings of being ridiculed, belittled, persecuted, or simply frustrated by their inability to adapt. Research does show that in the midst of a downturn domestic violence increases. NIOSH recommendations to help prevent violence at work relate to environmental controls – lighting, awareness, signage, etc. Only one specifically relates to employee interpersonal behavior—being trained in conflict resolution and nonviolent responses to conflict. At Sac State we have the added benefit of working within a community. Most people on campus either work here or attend school here, so they are interacting with others on a regular basis. While there is no clear way to predict who will become violent, we can identify who is distressed. Changes in mood or attitude is an indicator of distress. Likewise, over reacting to incidents is another. If you notice someone who appears might be in distress, respond. Either make note of the behavior (for future reference), intervene, or tell someone. By caring for people in distress, we can create a more secure environment.

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.