



# SUPERVISOR NOTES

November 2007

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

## Employee Assistance Program

278-5018 ↔ [eap@csus.edu](mailto:eap@csus.edu)

Webpage: [www.csus.edu/eaprogr](http://www.csus.edu/eaprogr)

Douglas Adams, LCSW, EAP Clinician

Cathy Connors, Psy.D, EAP Clinician

### In This Issue:

- > Socializing with Employees
- > Potential Problem Behaviors
- > Work Group Problems

- > Motivating Employees

Q. Last year our office held a holiday party at a hotel. A lot of employees, including me, drank quite a bit. No one drove home, but I worried the next day whether this kind of socializing harmed my image as a manager. Is it okay to socialize with employees in this manner?

A. It is important to set a good example for your employees and to have effective relationships with them that can positively influence their productivity. Overdrinking at a holiday party is not consistent with these goals beyond the other potential risks of such an event. Socializing with employees can be risky. A debate still rages among experts about how familiar supervisors should be with their employees. Some argue for avoiding any outside social interaction. Others say just the opposite. Would hosting a baby shower or a fishing trip for your work group be a problem? It might if your position of influence is damaged as a result. This can happen more easily than you might think. The necessary elevation of your position is reduced when employees possess knowledge about your personal life, which is more easily discovered or shared in social settings. However, building a positive relationship can also contribute to a healthy, vibrant work group. Before socializing with employees outside work, ask whether you risk damaging the perception employees have of you as a manager they respect.

As we enter the holiday season and the end of another year, it is important to remember that this is potentially a time of high stress and difficult emotions for many people. Not everyone approaches this time with high hopes and positive anticipation. Watch for signs of stress and unease among those you supervise. Remember that the EAP is available as a resource for you, as a supervisor, or for your employees. We will be open throughout the holiday season, except for the final week of the year.

Q. I am a new supervisor. Can you advise me on what behaviors to avoid that upset employees most, but which they are not likely to complain about until they have grown angry and resentful?

A. Help your employees by avoiding the following classic behaviors that will upset them, but which you are not likely to hear many complaints about until employees are completely fed up: 1) Asking employees to involve themselves with a project or task and then suddenly asking them to stop it and jump to another. 2) Proclaiming the tasks that you ask employees to take on as emergencies that need to be addressed immediately. 3) Correcting employees in front of their peers. 4) Promising anything you're not certain of in order to boost their morale, then later apologizing that you "couldn't get it approved." 5) Accepting credit from top management for projects completed by your staff, and then explaining to your staff that you had accepted thanks on their behalf. 6) Making inappropriate jokes, remarks, or innuendos. Most of these behaviors have one prevention technique: being aware of how you use the power naturally afforded by your position.

Q. Three of my employees argue and bicker with each other, and I am interested in having the EAP help resolve this conflict. I have identified one of the employees as the "troublemaker." Should I refer them individually, as a group, or just the one employee mentioned?

A. There are no hard-and-fast rules about a supervisor referral of the type you describe, but experience shows that referring each of these employees separately based upon the performance issues you have documented can produce good results. Supervisor referrals should be based on individual employees' issues, not the group's issues, because each employee reacts differently to this conflict and each has a different story to tell. Also, this approach better conforms to EAP standards. Each of your employees has a role to play in the resolution of the conflict, even if one employee is more provocative. After an initial assessment, the EAP may choose to work with your employees as a group, individually, or both.

Q. I struggle to motivate some of my employees. I just can't seem to find the right combination of incentives. On the other hand, most of my employees are enthusiastic and produce well. As for the few employees who struggle, can you offer any tips on motivating them?

A. Much has been written about motivation and how to get employees excited about their work. All this has been to the benefit of employees and work organizations. But there has been a downside: the mistaken belief by managers that all employees can be motivated and incentive-induced to become top performers, and if they can't, the manager is to blame. Once you have taken all reasonable steps to provide an effective and productive work environment, the rest is up to your employees. Your organization is in partnership with employees, who must ultimately take the ball you hand them and run with it. Some will perform well and others will not. The best type of motivation is self-motivation. That said, focusing on the performers and nurturing a positive work group will sometimes "bring along" those few who are not performing as well. Ultimately, the responsibility is theirs.

***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.