



SUPERVISOR NOTES

October 2009

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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The recent news about the murder of a University student really shocked me. The police said it was workplace violence that "could have happened anywhere." Aren't cases like this rare? I don't see how they can be prevented when they come out of the blue.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2008 there were a reported 517 homicides out of 5,071 workplace fatalities, so the problem isn't rare. No one can predict violence and no perfect intervention approach exists, but there are keys to prevention. Risk is reduced when employees are educated about workplace violence, its precursors, and how it manifests. A violence prevention policy is important, but taking action is what really counts. A caring work environment that make disclosure of personal concerns, threats, and worries by employees more likely can assist in prevention. Never make the assumption that *your* workplace, or its "caliber" of workers, precludes violence. Never dismiss or take lightly a verbal threat of violence. Educate employees about workplace harassment, behavioral expectations, victimization, maintaining professional boundaries, and encouraging respect. Working in a relatively contained environment such as Sac State increases the likelihood we can notice someone who is distressed, and therefore intervene before anything gets out of control. Distressed people can act erratically, more often against their own interests, but sometimes against others. Caring enough to notice and take action are key to everyone's safety.

I am concerned about the effect the furloughs are having on my employees. Is there anything I can do to mitigate the impact?



My employee is very bright and performs well, but he bends the rules, tests boundaries, and tries to see how much he can get away with at work. I would like to alter his patterns but am unsure how to proceed.

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

It's a tough time for everyone. It's important, as the supervisor, to pay attention to those you supervise. Watch for signs of distress; coming in late, a slippage in quality or quantity of work produced, a change in attitude or relationships with others. Times of stress frequently lead to a multitude of problems in both the home and work environments. These often first show up in changes at work. By watching for behavioral signs at work, you may be able to identify a growing problem that can be helped before it gets out of hand. Remember that people typically feel less resilient and able to cope as their level of stress increases. Address your employee with care and concern. Recommend assistance, including EAP if indicated. While we can not prevent people from being impacted by the current situation, we can help to minimize the negative effects by early intervention. It is important for all of us to watch out for each other during this time of high stress.

Talk to the employee and sift through the issues and behavioral concerns that you have about him. Be clear about your expectations and avoid letting him engage in “negotiating” the expectations. Make sure your demands are consistent with those you expect other employees to follow. Work with the him to formulate a plan for how and what you will document. Set up some regular times to check in as you want to be in a position to acknowledge the positive behaviors as well as the behaviors that are of concern. Employees as bright as the one you describe know their rights and often fight with gusto those actions they perceive as unjustified. By meeting regularly and documenting the progress you minimize his chances of claiming unfair treatment. You must also be clear and firm about the limits and expectations. Make an issue of anything that does not meet expectations as he is prone to test limits, looking for the point where you will respond.

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.