



SUPERVISOR NOTES

September, 2007

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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Q. My employee was hospitalized after causing an accident while driving drunk. I have learned from his family members that his doctor has not confronted him about his drinking problem or about alcoholism. Should I mention it to his doctor?

A. Speaking with your employee's doctor about your diagnosis of his drinking practices could lead to a serious complaint against you. In other words, he has the right to be left alone and be treated by his doctor without your interference. That said, it would be a good thing if doctors played a greater role in referring patients to alcoholism treatment. Many hospitals and physician associations are pushing for greater physician involvement in substance abuse intervention in medical settings, so things are changing for the better. What you can do is encourage the family members who talked with you to share the same information with the doctor. You can also talk with your employee when he returns and express your concern. You can recommend he consult with EAP, emphasizing that it is confidential and free of charge.

Q. I do not like to micromanage my employees, but at least two of them won't finish their work in a timely manner unless I am directly involved in what they do. I could refer them to the EAP, but frankly I think things will get worse before they get better. So now what?

A. Rather than refer your employees to the EAP, consider visiting the EAP yourself. We can help you find a way to make the changes you seek. Although supervisors frequently get the blame for micromanaging, some employees invite this type of relationship because they prefer it. Micromanaging forces employees to become dependent on the supervisor. In turn, the supervisor feels secure that the work is getting done the way he or she would do it. Many employees dislike being micromanaged, of course, and it is a key complaint identified in surveys and research on employee morale. Still, not all employees hate being micromanaged. Some prefer assurance that the supervisor is getting what he or she wants over having to be independent and in control of their work. These employees may feel anxious when they are not closely supervised, and they may avoid promotional opportunities that require them to be independent.

Q. I have never had an employee who needed a supervisor referral to the EAP, but I am sure many of them have personal issues in their lives and could benefit from the program. When is a good time to remind people to use the program if they need it?

A. A busy, functional office can easily forget that an EAP is available. The annual performance evaluation is one great time and place to mention the EAP to every employee individually and on a regular basis. Make it a habit to mention the EAP to every employee as a reminder—even if an employee is a top performer with outstanding marks. After all, EAP services are not limited to work site problems. Staff meetings are another time to periodically mention EAP. We can attend a staff meeting and give a brief presentation of services ranging from 5 to 30 minutes. Some employees just don't think about the EAP, and your reminder may prompt them to make the call about a nagging personal problem. Remind employees about the confidential nature of the EAP, and that it is free of charge and available for both themselves and their eligible family members.

Q. I have an employee who takes notes on my mistakes and records incidents when I get angry in the office. My relationship with her is a game that includes her resistance to or refusal of my requests. I am ready to let her go. She only laughed when I referred her to the EAP. Now what?

A. This is a complicated situation that you do not want to handle on your own. Consult with H.R. on your options and obligations. Also confer with EAP on exploring how the situation developed and any possible opportunities for it to be changed short of termination. You have control of your part of the interactions, and sometimes a change of tactics results in a change from the other person. Consulting with your own supervisors or others at your level is also appropriate. Make sure you allow yourself the support needed to deal with a very difficult and challenging situation.

Q. Evaluators or supervisors are often advised not to be their employees' friends. Does this mean we can't go to dinner, to a baseball game, or to holiday parties at one another's homes?

A. Avoiding close friendships with those you supervise refers to the conflict of interests that will naturally arise when loyalties are divided between two opposing positions. Your friend requires loyalty, and so does your employer. So when your employer's needs conflict with those of your employee, who are you to support? Avoiding friendship does not necessarily mean that you cannot socialize, but you should consider the circumstances of your work culture and the implications of not conforming to the boundaries that naturally exist between you and your subordinates (e.g., military officers do not socialize with enlisted personnel). Some even argue that employers have a right to demand loyalty or fidelity to their organizations, since they are paying their supervisors for it. Regardless, maintaining boundaries helps preserve both relationships—the one with your employer and the one with your employee. That said, there are many supervisors who are able to keep appropriate, consistent boundaries while also being friends with those they supervise. The key is staying aware of potential conflicts of interest.

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.