



SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

Employee Assistance Program

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- > "Difficult" versus "Troubled" Employee
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Employee negativity appears to be part of this current budget situation. As a manager, am I helpless to address it? I can't counsel employees, and I can't simply refer everyone to the EAP. So how do I make an impact?

Employee negativity can be worsened by the economy, but often the work environment fuels much of it. Supervisors don't hear it often enough, but employee negativity is sometimes not management's fault. However, everyone has a responsibility to intervene. Decide where your influence rests by considering the following factors, any of which impact morale and negativity. Any of these issues could contribute to workplace negativity: (1) excessive workload; (2) concerns about the manager's ability to lead successfully; (3) anxiety about the future; (4) retirement security uncertainties; (5) lack of challenging work; (6) insufficient recognition or concerns that pay isn't commensurate with performance; (7) chronic co-worker personality conflicts; (8) perceived disinterest in the employee's career needs; and/or (9) a lack of opportunity to vent and process workplace stressors, misconceptions, rumors, and misperceptions. Notice how many of these issues are associated with or may be resolved by effective communication. You may have the ability to influence change in any of these areas. Be active and engage your employees in open dialogue.



Are a “difficult” employee and a “troubled” employee the same thing? How might the supervisor’s role in managing difficult employees differ from the troubled employee?

In the EAP view, a difficult employee becomes a troubled employee when a supervisor’s attempts to correct unacceptable behavior aren’t successful. In other words, just because an employee demonstrates difficult behavior doesn’t necessarily mean he or she is troubled with a personal problem that requires professional intervention. Most employees with difficult behaviors readily self-correct when the supervisor insists on it. While a difficult employee may have a personality style and behavioral patterns that grate on others, a troubled employee tries to control these behaviors unsuccessfully in an attempt to prevent adverse effects on job performance and security. Ultimately, however, troubled employees fail at willfully making the corrections they want because of underlying personal problems contributing to their dysfunctions.



I am concerned about the impact the furloughs will have on my staff. I am guessing this is a problem that will get progressively worse.

I believe your guess is accurate. This is a new situation we are facing, and the economic impact will certainly get progressively harder for people, exacerbating the work stress. Watch for signs of distress; changes in attitude, demeanor, or work habits. Express your concern early. The sooner a situation can be identified, the smaller the impact it may have on someone. Simply letting someone know you notice and care enough to ask can be a powerful action. Make an extra effort to notice and reinforce positive effort. Encourage everyone to make realistic goals given the decrease in both staff and also time, and acknowledge the successes as too often during times of increased stress we focus on what still needs to get done. Above all, recognize that you, as a manager, are not immune to these stressors. Good supervisors often notice and intervene on an employee’s behalf when they notice the employee needs a break; but no one is necessarily watching out for you in the same manner. This is a long term situation and requires the ability to sustain.

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.