



SUPERVISOR NOTES

A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

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Employee Assistance Program

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In This Issue:

- Will my department look bad if my employee tells the EAP clinician about the problems we are having?
- Managing worry: when is it constructive and when is it a hindrance?
- How do I help employees correct their performance—without alienating them?
- Management style: if my employees understand my style, could it still be problematic?
- Can the EAP help resolve work issues so that my employees do not need to resort to filing a grievance?

Question: Our work unit's director has subtly discouraged employees from using the EAP because he does not want employees to "air the laundry" of our work unit along with personal problems. This information is also confidential, correct?

Answer: Confidentiality of EAP records pertains not only to the identities of those who use the program and the personal information they share with employee assistance professionals, but also other information, such as sensitive issues and problems of work units, rumors, morale concerns, and more. This information is held in confidence in accordance with EAP policies and is not shared with other parts of the work organization. It is not unusual for a manager to be concerned about what is reported outside the work unit by employees, but managers have nothing to fear from the EAP. Employee assistance professionals frequently learn about many issues of the work organization, concerns of employee work groups, trends in morale, and more. But this is what makes employee assistance professionals so valuable when they are invited to help plan programs and services that benefit employees, consult on policies that address employee issues, and make other contributions to the health of the organization.

Question: I am a worrywart about how management thinks my work unit is doing. Although I have been a manager for several years, I can't seem to quiet myself down enough to enjoy my job. What can I do to change? Can the EAP help?

Answer: Although some worry can arguably be considered a healthy and self-preserving virtue of a good manager, being in a state of excessive anxiety and distress will interfere with your ability to perform the duties of your position. Recognizing that your worrying cannot exist in isolation but will affect the employees you supervise can motivate you to gain better control over it. The EAP can help you locate sources of help and understanding what contributes to your worrisome state. There are many approaches including thought blocking; stress management techniques; reinterpreting the balance between reality, fears, and worry; and making sure no medical condition contributes to your anxiety.

Question: What are the key ingredients supervisors should consider when helping an employee correct performance?

Answer: Helping an employee correct a performance problem employs steps known to facilitate change within the context of an effective relationship. Correcting performance and managing people is both an art and a science. There are three important steps for correcting performance that are often neglected by supervisors: 1) Placing emphasis on the problem rather than on the employee. This approach elicits a partnership with the employee to solve the problem and helps avoid a defensive reaction of guilt and blame; 2) Involving the employee in analyzing the problem. You may be certain of the problem's cause, but helping your employee analyze and examine the cause will instill greater commitment to resolve it, and 3) Following up with your employee. This step reinforces your employee's investment in correcting the performance problem and inhibits a setback.

Question: I yell a lot – I admit it! It's my nature to get emotional, curse, and slam objects on tables, etc. I am sure it rattles nerves, but I think my employees understand me. Is there any reason to change my stress management style?

Answer: Employees frequently offer each other mutual support to cope with temperamental supervisors who are prone to emotional outbursts. So your employees may appear to understand you and remain loyal. They do not confront your behavior because they are coping in another way. Still, you should take steps to manage your stress differently. The EAP can help. Employees may "understand you," but you risk being accused of creating a hostile or offensive workplace should you ever need to take action against a worker with performance problems. Your behavior might be used as a way to explain substandard performance. This would be difficult to argue against. Even worse, a troubled employee who resigns could blame you for feeling forced to quit. This could have serious ramifications for you.

Question: What role do EAPs play in reducing the likelihood of grievances filed by employees in organizations?

Answer: EAPs play a preventive role in resolving personal problems that can contribute to conflict with management. This reduces grievances. In other words, a troubled employee helped is a risk reduced. Some problems like sexual harassment present such high risk to an organization that personnel policies may encourage employees to use the grievance process, if necessary, to stop it. The grievance process is an important tool in such an instance. Although a grievance can be time-consuming, the process can resolve disputes that could otherwise pose greater risks to all concerned. When helping employees with personal problems, considering the needs of both employees and the organization is often part of the EAP helping process. The ability to find this balance is the art of EAP work and what makes EAPs so desirable. Sometimes the best and first step in any grievance process is talking with the supervisor. EAPs frequently help employees to do this more effectively.

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 your Employee Assistance Program professional.

