

SOLUTIONS

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Question: What traits should I look for in employees likely to become good managers someday? Are managers "born" or can people learn to become managers?

Answer: Managerial skills can be taught. However, there are many behavioral traits that support the role of a good manager. Keeping an eye open for some of them can help you spot employees who might be management material. Look for employees who are comfortable with who they are and have positive views of themselves. But also look for a corresponding interest in learning and growing. Obviously, a manager can't be someone who hides behind a desk or prefers to be alone, so look for employees who like people, are assertive, "get out in front," and stay involved with the group. Honesty and the ability to make a decision, and the ability to be straightforward are also important traits. Employees who are hesitant to share bad news, overcautious about choices, or withhold information others need to know, typically struggle with the role of manager. Employees likely to be good managers avoid cliques. Instead, they reach out, believing that everyone has a role to play and a valuable contribution to make. A manager does not have to be charismatic, but employees who make good managers demonstrate confidence that others see or sense.

Question: I keep struggling with documentation. When an employee is slow, appears tired, and acts sad, I call it "depressed." It seems more to the point and descriptive. As a result, my documentation has been criticized. Not using labels is difficult. Can the EAP help me?

Answer: An important part of employee assistance work is helping supervisors learn the skills of documentation. Documentation can be tricky because you must convey what you see and hear but omit what you feel and conclude. This takes practice because it is tempting to focus on other factors that are subjective and emotional. The key is to avoid drawing conclusions about personal problems, stating how you feel about the employee's behavior, conveying diagnostic impressions, or filling your documentation with drama. These things sabotage the usefulness of your documentation for administrative purposes. To improve your documentation, consider whether it describes what is measurable or observable. Depression (a medical term to avoid using in documentation) can't be "seen", but slow talking, days missed, lack of work progress, crying, and sad looks are observable.



Question: We have a very diverse workplace, and I sometimes correct employees when I see them demonstrating poor tolerance of coworkers' differences. I am not an expert on tolerance and bias, so can you offer some tips in educating employees?

Answer: Education does help alter bias, but the bottom line is that employee behavior must conform to what is civil and supportive of each other and your organization's work goals. Let employees know that the goal of tolerance is a respectful workplace and that without it, the interests of the work organization are not served. When correcting employee behavior in the context of supervisory meetings, your goal should be to educate, not counsel or investigate the psychological influences of employee bias. Given that, the following can help your discussions be more effective. Key tolerance principles:

- Look past differences of opinion, orientation, ethnic, or racial backgrounds and, instead, focus on understanding a colleague's views and perspective.
- 2. Avoid the trap of tuning out simply because someone talks or looks different.
- 3. Avoid labels. Monitor your speech patterns—and thinking style—to check whether you label others.
- 4. If you disagree with someone's views, react with curiosity rather than immediate defensiveness. Ask at least one earnest, nonthreatening question for additional information. Be willing to change your mind.
- 5. Speak up when hurtful comments are overheard.
- 6. Reject intolerance when you see it demonstrated.

Question: Our work culture includes a lot of swearing at each other, but it's never serious. In fact, I would say we have affection for each other. Is the swearing a problem? Should I try to get it to stop?

Answer: Talk to the EAP and discuss a way of turning this around and curtailing this type of communication. If you swear at each other when things are going well, what happens when things are not going well or when you have an employee you wish to correct or discipline? It is likely that you are swearing at these times as well. The foul language is a risk issue for your employer because as a manager you have condoned a disrespectful communication style as a normal part of your work culture. If a complaint was lodged, you would face a difficult time explaining how this is nothing more than an affectionate form of communication. You have a responsibility to protect employees from a hostile and offensive work environment, and it is virtually impossible to show that this sort of interaction supports that goal.

Question: We don't have a policy against accessing social networking websites, but one of my employees can't stay away from these sites, even after I insist. Is this an addiction?

Answer: Although it is hotly debated, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders will not include "Internet Addiction Disorder" (IAD) in 2013 when it is next revised and published. This has no bearing, of course, on your task of managing the problematic use of the computer by your employee. Meet with your employee, and with your documentation in hand, make a supervisor referral to the EAP. Even though IAD is not officially a mental disorder, it can still be treated with help from the EAP, along with support and follow-up.

Question: If I am too soft as a supervisor and need to get more assertive with employees who break rules, come in late, or don't produce quality work, can the EAP help me quickly turn things around?

Answer: The EAP can help, but it is likely that you will need support, coaching, and more than a couple of meetings to accomplish your goal of making the changes you want. You should anticipate that employees will resist your efforts at a supervision style "makeover" because they have naturally grown to believe that you don't take certain things seriously. The EAP will consult with you on managing the reactions of individual employees, some of whom may resist more than others, and may offer to coach you for a while until you establish a new set of expectations and acceptable level of cooperation from your employees. You may need your manager's support along the way, too. The EAP may have other resources to recommend after an assessment.

Question: I know bullying is not limited to employees and that some managers can be guilty of this behavior. Is there any research that analyzes why bosses bully? Can bullies see their symptoms, and self-correct? How many employees experience bullying?

Answer: A study conducted in 2009 by the University of California–Berkeley examined the idea that bullying among managers might result from feelings of inadequacy about the job. Several other studies that focused on bosses as bullies demonstrated the link that aggression goes up when one feels threatened. One study estimated that 37 percent of workers claim their bosses had sabotaged their work, belittled them, or yelled at them. No study can say that every boss who bullies feels inadequate, but

this is a recurring finding in boss-as-bully studies. A coping mechanism frequently seen by employees in these studies is overly praising or flattering the boss. A supervisor who is on the receiving end of this behavior may wish to consider whether his or her supervision style includes a strong bullying component. Of course, there is no better place to discuss a change in this type of communication than at the EAP. *Source: UC Berkeley News Release (October 13, 2009).*"

Question: My employee does not drink on the job, but I know by appearance that this person is suffering from a hangover a couple of times a month. I cannot say that job performance is affected, but there must be something I can do to formally intervene. What approach should I use?

Answer: Talk to the EAP first. Because you are having difficulty identifying performance issues associated with what appears to be a hangover, a consult is warranted. Remember, the goal is to help you make an effective supervisor referral. A confidential discussion with an EAP professional can assist you with developing a plan or approach that includes specific performance issues. You may also need tips on how to better spot performance issues as they occur. Employees with hangovers do not function at optimal levels, and spotting these workrelated deficiencies is therefore the key. Some of them will be obvious, but others will be more subtle. What some people don't realize is that many symptoms of hangovers create cognitive and psychomotor dysfunction, so helping your employee stop this behavior is a safety issue as much as it is a productivity concern.





Question: I have been documenting my employee's performance issues for a couple of months. I have kept the notes private because I may need them to prove my case that the employee is not suitable for the position, and if I share the documentation, it will make this harder. Is this okay?

Answer: Documentation is first and foremost a communication tool to establish a record of events that have transpired, the employee responses to confrontations, and corrective measures you've instituted to help your employee meet certain standards. At this stage, helping your employee change or improve is what's key. If you construct documentation with no intent to share it with your employee, you risk the appearance of treating it as a diary or personal log where you share emotions or other inappropriate formulations of your observations and private thoughts. These can undermine whatever purpose you plan for the documentation later, as your documentation then becomes an obviously one-sided presentation that does not reflect the employee's acknowledgement of your concerns, his or her reaction to them, or plans and opportunities to make the changes you desire.

Question: When being confronted on a specific matter, my employee glared saying, "You know, I am really about to get into someone's face!" The employee stormed off. This employee often has a hostile tone, but my supervisor and I debated whether this was a threat. What do you think?

Answer: Consider the following adage: "The meaning of your communication is the response that you get." In this instance, at least one of you perceived your employee's statement as a threat. Most employees know that they can't openly make threats at work. So what you may be witnessing is belligerence cloaked with an offhand, cryptic expression. You got the message this employee intended to send. You do not need to split hairs and debate what was meant, or the precise meaning of his or her statement. Feeling threatened is enough to confront and correct this behavior. Your employee may have issues with boundaries, anger management, self-control, and respect. Behavior of this sort tends to get worse and is reinforced by those who experience it, minimize its meaning, and then do not take steps to address it.

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 800.765.0770

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