

SOLUTIONS

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Question: My employee does not like her job, but she is good at it. I don't have another position for her, and she doesn't want to quit. Her morale is not very good. Sometimes her attitude is poor. Is there a way to help her feel more joy in her position?

Answer: There are several things that you can do that might help your employee. Try helping her set goals during the coming year so she can look forward to some meaningful accomplishments. Find ways of rewarding her for steps along the way. Come up with different things that she can do voluntarily on her breaks, if she likes, that will allow her to gain new skills and abilities. Think in terms of giving her more responsibility in the office, not necessarily more work. More responsibility is a powerful reward for employees, sometimes better than a raise because it influences how people feel about themselves. Don't rule out a referral to the EAP if her attitude gets worse. You may wish to suggest a self-referral now. There could be a personal issue contributing to her attitude problems.

Question: Referring an employee to the EAP because of severe conduct problems is straightforward. My concern is how I approach an employee who appears disturbed or agitated on the job?

Answer: Many supervisors share your concern, but planning the steps you would take in a situation where an employee appears upset or agitated can help you feel better prepared if it happens. Your organization

does not want you to place yourself at risk, so consider if you need help from another manager, or even the police in an unusual situation. Some troubled employees may exhibit unusual behaviors that are not threatening, such as talking strangely, appearing confused or disoriented or crying. Enlisting another manager to help you approach an employee can be helpful. This reduces defensiveness, and you gain the benefit of having a reliable witness in case one is needed later. Guiding the employee to a private office or work space away from others or an unsafe environment is a good first step. Gently encourage the employee to accompany you and your colleague; don't grab the person's hand or otherwise risk antagonizing him or her. Know your organization's fitness-for-duty policy; don't read it only after a crisis ensues!

Question: Last December our office held a holiday party at a hotel. A lot of employees, including me, drank quite a bit. No one drove home, but I worried the next day whether this kind of socializing harmed my image as a manager. Is it okay to socialize with employees in this manner?

Answer: It is important to set a good example for your employees and to have effective relationships with them that can positively influence their productivity. Overdrinking at a holiday party is not consistent with these goals beyond the other risks of



such an event. Socializing with employees can be risky. A debate still rages among experts about how familiar supervisors should be with their employees. Some argue for avoiding any outside social interaction. Others say just the opposite. Would hosting a baby shower or a fishing trip for your work group be a problem? It might if your position of influence is damaged as a result. This can happen more easily than you might think. The necessary elevation of your position is reduced when employees possess knowledge about your personal life, which is more easily discovered or shared in social settings outside work. Before socializing with employees outside work, ask whether you risk damaging the perception employees have of you as a manager they respect. That perception is certainly what your employer wants.

Question: I want to be a good role model to my employees. What are some ways of doing this that will help them be better employees and also make them more valuable to the organization?

Answer: Be a role model to your employees in the following ways, which are typically overlooked by many supervisors, and you will be applauded at the top of your organization:

- Demonstrate that you have an understanding of the economics of your industry and the key issues of concern faced by your organization in the marketplace.
- 2) Make decisions consistent with these issues.
- 3) Follow the organization's policies, never accept mediocrity and be creative.
- 4) Don't let your ego get in the way of being open-minded, asking for help and seeking advice from others who have a different perspective on problems.

5) Don't be afraid to surround yourself with people smarter than you, and show that you focus on overcoming obstacles to success, not whining about them.

Question: I think supervisors are sometimes too worried about getting involved with the personal problems of employees. As a result they appear impersonal and employees recognize it. This compounds problems because employees think the supervisor does not care about them. Am I right?

Answer: There is a difference between getting involved in an employee's personal problems and being supportive. A supervisor does not have to behave in a detached and aloof manner to keep from getting involved with the employee's issues. The challenge comes when a personal problem appears simple or understandable to the supervisor. It is then tempting to offer advice, despite unknown dimensions to the problem that might exist. The other part of this challenge comes from employees who want the supervisor involved in their problems. These employees want a different type of relationship with their supervisor—one that meets their personal needs. Supervisors should resist, as it is important for them to understand that meeting personal needs and going beyond their normal role will almost always interfere with managing productivity later.

Question: I am a new supervisor. Can you advise me on what behaviors to avoid that upset employees most, but which they are not likely to complain about until they have grown angry and resentful?

Answer: Help your employees by avoiding the following classic behaviors that will upset them, but which you are not likely to hear many complaints about until employees are completely fed up:

- 1) Asking employees to involve themselves with a project or task and then suddenly asking them to stop it and jump to another.
- Proclaiming the tasks that you ask employees to take on are emergencies that need to be addressed immediately.
- 3) Correcting employees in front of their peers.
- 4) Promising anything you're not certain of to employees in order to boost their morale, then later apologizing that you "couldn't get it approved."
- Accepting credit from top management for projects completed by your staff, and then explaining to your staff that you had accepted thanks on their behalf.
- 6) Making inappropriate jokes, remarks or innuendos. Most of these behaviors can be prevented by being aware of how you use the power that naturally falls to you by your position.

Question: I struggle to motivate some of my employees. I just can't seem to find the right combination of incentives. On the other hand, most of my employees are enthusiastic and produce well. As for the few employees who struggle, can you offer any tips on motivating them?

Answer: Much has been written about motivation and how to get employees excited about their work. All this has been to the benefit of employers and work organizations. But there has been a downside: the mistaken belief by managers that all employees

can be motivated and incentive-induced to become top performers, and if they can't, the manager is to blame. Once you have taken all reasonable steps to provide an effective and productive work environment, the rest is up to your employees. Your organization is in partnership with employees, who must ultimately take the ball you hand them and run with it. Some will perform well and others will not. Many supervisors are too hard on themselves as they struggle to find the secret to motivating all employees all the time. The best type of motivation is self-motivation.

Question: My employee does not remember what I ask him to do. He responds to questions with weird answers unrelated to the topic. He drives our vehicles, so I am worried about safety. Our company has a fitness-for-duty procedure, but should I consult with the EAP before I act on it?

Answer: Fitness-for-duty policies include information and steps to guide supervisors in acting on them. Use these to decide how to act. Consult with your human resource advisor, if needed, so you are completely clear on the necessary steps and can document that you acted responsibly. If the EAP is part of your fitness-for-duty evaluation and return-to-work process, the formal EAP referral and fitness-for-duty referral may be one step. If not, you could make a separate supervisor referral to the EAP using documentation to support it. The EAP will make an assessment and, depending on its outcome, choose appropriate resources to further evaluate your employee's needs and/or coordinate its efforts with the fitness-for-duty process.





Question: My employee was referred to the EAP because of chronic tardiness. A few days later, he came to work with a doctor's note saying that he will be unpredictably late to work because of his medical condition. A release is signed, but the EAP is not aware of the note. Now what?

Answer: Discuss this note with your manager or human resource advisor. It is important to determine, or inquire, whether this is a note from the doctor explaining your employee's unpredictable lateness to work or if it represents a request to accommodate his illness by permitting unpredictable lateness to work. You may decide that it is not possible to accommodate unpredictable lateness because it is an essential function of his position to be on time. In this case, the EAP will need to work with him further, if possible. If you ultimately decide that it is permissible for him to come unpredictably late to work (unusual but possible), then the EAP's work may be done. This situation represents a good example of why it can be important to consult with management resources so you can respond properly to medical issues interfering with attendance and performance.

Question: Three of my employees argue and bicker with each other, and I am interested in having the EAP help resolve this conflict.

I have identified one of the employees as the "troublemaker." Should I refer them individually, as a group or just the one employee mentioned?

Answer: There are no hard-and-fast rules about a supervisor referral of the type you describe, but experience shows that referring each of these employees separately based upon the performance issues you have documented can produce good results. Referrals should be based on an individual's issues, not the group's issues, because each employee reacts differently to this conflict and each has a different story to tell. Also, this approach better conforms to EAP standards. Each employee has a role to play in the resolution of the conflict, even if one employee is more provocative. After an initial assessment, the EAP may choose to work with your employees as a group, individually or both. Consult with the EAP before making the referral.

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 800.765.0770

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