

SOLUTIONS

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Question: Has the importance of maintaining high employee morale changed in the current business environment versus the past? What are the implications regarding my role in keeping morale high?

Answer: High morale has always been important, but it's why high morale is important that has changed. Understanding this change can help you keep morale high and ensure that you do not de-motivate employees. Modern society has moved to an information and service economy. More than ever before, the assets of the majority of employers in this modern age are the ideas, innovation, creativity, experience, complex skills and intelligence of workers. Decay of these assets from low morale will cause any modern organization to lose ground to the competition. In the past, when the economy was fueled by industry, production and distribution systems, high morale helped retain hardworking employees, but there has been a shift in the profile of the typical worker. Rather than forcing established methods and production schedules on employees, employers now rely on their resourcefulness, creativity, and innovative thinking. Maintaining a well-nurtured workforce that sticks around, produces ideas, innovates, and grows its skills is vital to your economic survival, now more than ever.

Question: I have read about the value of soft skills. I agree that they are essential. But how do I discover employees who possess them? Some previous employers don't give references, so you don't know until it's too late that a new hire can't maintain effective relationships.

Answer: You're right, it is difficult to see evidence of well-honed soft skills by looking at a résumé. Proficiency can be difficult to gauge because soft skills are dependent upon one's attitude, self-image and relationship skills. Comparing answers candidates give to open-ended questions in job interviews can help. A team of interviewers is the best choice to prepare and ask questions because of the subjective nature of the answers. Judging the "best" response can vary from one person to the next, and a discussion can build consensus. Remember to formulate questions to cause the person to open up and explain what he or she would do in response to a work situation. Start questions with how, what, and why. Remember to ask questions using scenarios that underscore important aspects of work and, just as important, your unique work culture. Talk to your HR experts to learn more.



Question: My employee reported concern about being stalked by an individual. I am glad the employee came to me because I want to be supportive. Can you offer suggestions on managing this issue?

Answer: Review your organization's policy on violence in the workplace, if one exists, to ensure that you follow established procedures. Meet with your manager or key managers and human resources to discuss the issue, and determine the safety concerns to address. Suggest that your employee contact the EAP for support and guidance. You're smart not to ignore this complaint. Too frequently, stalking is perceived as just another personal problem; however, stalking is a serious crime with significant risks, especially for women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace and one out of eight homicides is due to a stalker. Key issues to discuss include how to respond to restraining orders, whether other employees should be informed, the role of the police, etc.

Question: I view myself as a tolerant person, but I admit that I am not comfortable with text messaging as a workplace communication tool. In my view, this is a faddish thing for weekend socializing. Is this my problem? Do I need to get with the times?

Answer: Text messaging is getting more attention in business literature as younger workers who are generally comfortable with instant message (IM) communication enter the workplace to find older peers or managers uncomfortable with it. Being open to change is valuable, but not every new convention requires you to adapt to it. Although learning to text message may have useful business applications, it is appropriate to expect employees skilled in the

technique to rely upon conventional communication methods if those work best for your organization. The call to understand, adapt, change and get with the times are big stressors for managers and employees alike, but some things do not change. One of them is the need for effective relationships and good communication that will produce results for the bottom line. The good news is that young people today are an upbeat, empowered, ambitious, and eager-to-learn group of folks who value honesty. So you can anticipate their cooperation.

Question: I have an employee who is a superstar performer, but acts like a bully toward a coworker. This coworker has not complained and does not appear upset by the behavior. They seem to get along quite well. Should I leave this situation alone and not be concerned? Can the EAP help?

Answer: Even though the bullying has not been reported, if you've observed it then you should address it. Not all victims are reduced to visible anguish by bullies. Instead, they try to cope and suffer in silence. These employees can pay a big price in dealing with lost productivity and negative effects on their health. Ignoring your good judgment that a problem exists can jeopardize everyone involved. Like sexual harassment, bullying is not always reported by victims despite their victimization, but if you know about it, you must address the problem immediately. Intervene and rely upon the reasonable standards of behavior and respect needed in the workplace as the basis for taking action. Act in accordance with your policies. Refer the bullying employee to the EAP. Afterward, talk with the victim about standards of conduct, and offer the EAP as a possible source of support.

Question: I sense a subtle resentment toward me by my employees regarding my role, and I've heard statements that suggest I don't do enough work. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am not very visible, but I am shocked at how naïve some of my employees appear to be?

Answer: Many supervisors are the subject of behind-the-scenes conversations by employees who have little awareness of their activities. As a result, employees may assume that their supervisors do very little. Of course, usually the opposite is true. Management expert and author Robert J. Graham once remarked, "If they know nothing of what you are doing, they suspect that you are doing nothing." This observation points to your solution. Avoid the temptation to be just an overseer or absent and mysterious person to your employees. More important, spend some time with them. Even if giving them more information about your activities is not advisable, this relationship-building activity will reduce the degree to which you are viewed as kicking back while they do the heavy lifting. Usually, lack of communication is what drives employee suspicion about their supervisor's lack of contribution.

Question: My employee went to treatment for a drug addiction problem. I'm glad the employee is in treatment, but if this person relapses, who will know first—the EAP or me? Will the relapse appear as a performance issue or with physical symptoms that demonstrate drug use?

Answer: A relapse could be discovered through an EAP follow-up interview, by you witnessing the employee's behavior on the job, or even by a third party. Unfortunately, the desire to prevent or predict relapse by those in relationships with substance abusing persons does not lend itself to precise

formulas. There are some common denominators, however, that prove helpful in prevention. For managers, staying focused on performance and detaching from concerns about what is going on in recovery is one. From the EAP's perspective, helping the employee remain motivated to participate in activities that aid recovery and to avoid those things that will impede it are crucial. The rest is up to the employee. Relapse can occur suddenly without warning, but it can also be secretive, with controlled use of a substance hidden from others for weeks or months.

Question: I meet with many employees and frequently correct performance. Unfortunately, I often find myself forgetting the content of many discussions so I can't be definite about what was said, negotiated, or agreed to. How can I improve my memory?

Answer: You have heard the expression "If it isn't in writing, it doesn't exist." This is a good philosophy for supervisors to follow and relates to the crucial art of taking contemporaneous notes. No matter how good your memory or ability to recall past events, even in exquisite detail, it's no match for the power of contemporaneous notes. They can serve to prove you point, despite their subjectivity at the time originally written, as to what actually happened or who said what. Develop the habit of routinely keeping notes on disputes, negotiations, corrective actions and performance matters regarding your employees. Although the importance of documentation is often discussed in supervisory skills courses, the routine use of contemporaneous notes is a related skill that supervisors should also come to appreciate.





Question: One of my employees has returned to work following a heart attack. Is there anything I can do to help him not have another one? This is a pretty high-stress environment. Should I talk him into reducing his hours?

Answer: Your employee should let you know if he needs any help from the organization to support his recovery, but you can also ask how best to support him. Almost all jobs include stress. Beyond stress is something called "job strain," which is high psychological demand from work pressure combined with little ability to control it. Some research has shown job strain as a factor in the recurrence of heart attacks. In Japan, the work "karoshi" means "death from work" and it is a widely studied social concern. To reduce job strain on employees, try reducing psychological pressure of work demands. If possible, increase the employee's control and decision making over those work demands. What about the long hours? In some studies, long work hours alone were not associated with recurrent cardiovascular events, only job strain (Journal of Occupational Health, No. 45, 2005).

Question: I didn't get a very good rating on my performance evaluation as a supervisor. I don't think I need to get help, but can the EAP discuss my supervision issues, style and how I come across with employees? Is this appropriate or is the EAP for bigger problems?

Answer: The EAP is for the big problems and the little ones. Seeking guidance with your supervision style fits perfectly within the official description of what EAPs do. It includes providing consultation with, training of, and assistance to work organization leadership seeking to better manage troubled employees, enhance the work environment, and improve employee job performance. It's very tough to be objective and analytical about your own supervision style. Sometimes consultants are able to point out issues that are obvious even thought we cannot see them at first, which is the basis for consulting on any topic or speciality area.

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 800.765.0770

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