

SOLUTIONS

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Question: I know that managers are not "born," they're made, but isn't it true that some managers are natural leaders due to certain traits that can't be taught? Can the EAP help me be a better leader?

Answer: The skills of leadership are learned, but some people do possess personalities with more personal charm and "magnetism" than others do. This is called charisma. Certainly not all great leaders are charismatic, however. And not all charismatic people are good leaders. This makes leadership skills more important. Leadership is intensely studied. There are leadership schools, courses, training, recognized styles of leadership, theories, research, and accepted practices that are universally taught. Nearly anyone can learn to apply effective leadership skills. How you speak to employees, the logic used to convey direction and inspiration, and the techniques for enlisting contributions from others in pursuit of a goal constitute leadership. Your organization may have resources to support your leadership education goals, but the EAP may be useful in helping you troubleshoot personal roadblocks that sometimes interfere with leadership skills, such as a need to learn assertiveness, effective listening, empathic reasoning, self-awareness, and more.

Question: Many employees who experience harassment, discrimination, bullying, or disrespect don't report it. However, it is important for supervisors to know if it's happening. How do we find out so that we can address it?

Answer: Beyond assigning tasks and evaluating performance, supervisors must get to know their employees individually. This does not mean prying into their personal lives but rather getting to know them one-on-one so trust develops and they are willing to come to you with their complaints. Few supervisors understand this point: It is arguably a safety issue not to get to know employees one-onone. Only a nurtured and maintained sense of trust between you and your employee will facilitate an employee coming to you with issues of personal and work-related importance requiring your intervention. Not all problems that employees have on the job are technical. Some problems may be personal and workrelevant, such as conflicts with coworkers, feelings of inadequacy concerning tasks, and fear of making mistakes. These combined personal and work-related concerns will only be shared with supervisors who are trusted. Nurturing this trust starts with you.



Question: Are there any common myths about illicit/illegal drug use that interfere with supervisor referrals to the EAP?

Answer: The most common supervisory myth about illicit drug use is the belief that an employee who abuses drugs will "look like a drug user," or will have obvious drug-affected behavior on the job. This stereotype has continued for nearly 50 years. It is still a challenge to help supervisors get past it when training them to use an Employee Assistance Program as a resource and tool to intervene with troubled employees. Modern-day EAPs emerged in the mid-1970s to help address these misconceptions by educating supervisors to stop looking for addicts or drug users and instead to start referring employees to the EAP based on performance-or attendance-related problems. Training focuses on doing this without regard to one's suspicion regarding drug use. The result of this major shift in addressing alcohol problems in the workplace was an increase in referrals of alcoholics and, of course, drug-addicted employees so they could be diagnosed and helped.

Question: A few employees were in the break room telling "blonde" jokes. No other employees were there, but I felt uncomfortable with the banter, so I asked them to change the subject. Did I overreact? One employee always seems to be the instigator in these kinds of exchanges.

Answer: You aren't overreacting. It was a smart move to interrupt. The workplace requires employees to be more self-aware and careful of their behavior at work than outside of work. Laws and penalties have grown increasingly severe for employers when work environments are proven to be hostile or offensive. A pattern of these types of exchanges makes that easy to prove, and a case against the employer hardens

when supervisors don't step in to stop it. It's even worse if they are participants. As employees become more friendly and familiar with each other, it is natural for boundaries to loosen up, but it requires prudent supervision to step in when necessary. If one of your employees has more difficulty than others in demonstrating appropriate behavior, consider your options for correcting it. The EAP is a resource to assist employees in this regard.

Question: I know EAPs can help employees return to satisfactory levels of job performance and that this helps the bottom line. But isn't it a stretch to say that EAPs help reduce costs associated with things such as litigation, injuries, or even damaged equipment?

Answer: Employees affected by severe personal problems may experience a wide range of behavioral issues, many of which directly affect the bottom line. However, like an iceberg, other cost benefits exist beneath the surface. Reduced turnover or absenteeism, for example, has secondary cost benefits. The hiring of temporary workers or paying overtime to others to complete work assignments is avoided. When the EAP helps an employee who otherwise would have been terminated, the risk of litigation, legal expenses, paperwork, and lost management time is avoided. A drug addict who enters treatment and recovery may no longer steal materials that are resold for drugs. An employee no longer distracted by a personal crisis may avoid a costly accident. Almost any cost benefit has multiple other cost savings associated with it, and this makes an EAP a great investment.

Question: I know that domestic violence happens and that signs and symptoms can show up at work. How should supervisors respond, and should we take our cues for how to respond from the employee's assurances that "everything is alright," "not that bad," or "it's all over now"?

Answer: Domestic abuse is a very serious problem that is not always fully understood by coworkers or supervisors. It can quickly spill into the workplace and jeopardize employees' lives. There is no way for a manager to judge the degree of seriousness associated with domestic violence once it is discovered. Do not judge such incidents as "not that bad" or "over and done with" based upon the employee-victim's report. Victims typically minimize their plight to prevent management attention and coworker involvement. Supervisors may readily accept a victim's assurances that there is "nothing to worry about." When domestic violence is suspected, contact the EAP to discuss possible steps you should take, how to approach the employee, and what type of referral to consider. An informal or Employer Recommended Referral may be suggested by the EAP as the first step. If the situation persists and there are related job performance issues, a formal referral may then be appropriate. . A serious misstep is thinking that a supervisor referral will make things worse, is a punitive step that blames the employee, or is no longer needed because things "have blown over."

Question: When employees mention personal problems, for instance problems with a teenager, why is it not appropriate to give the employee a helpful book or instructional pamphlet on the subject, especially if the pamphlet is written by an authority?

Answer: Any employee assistance professional will tell you from experience that there is always more to

the employee's story than the supervisor knows. For example, you may learn about the problems with a teenager, but be completely unaware of its root cause. Your employee may also be unaware of the cause. Difficulties with a teenager could be caused by dozens of possible problems in a family, the symptoms of which are troubles with a teenager. If you provide information about parenting a teenager to your employee, it could add to the delay in getting proper help.

Question: My employee's desk looks like a bomb went off. This person is our office genius and numbers wiz. It's been like this for years. I am not sure how hard I should push to correct this problem. It looks bad, but beyond that, what other reasons support confrontation?

Answer: Employees with messy desks and work spaces are common complaints for supervisors. Adverse consequences of this problem may not be readily apparent, but they are numerous. It's important to know that causes of messy desks are not all equal. Some employees have work habits that lead to disorganization. Others may have personal problems, the symptoms of which are disorganization. So don't rule out the existence of a personal problem. Beyond appearance, consider these known costs of messy work areas: the offensive visual appearance other employees must endure; the financial impact of more frequently used office supplies; the lost time associated with delays in completing assignments or looking for things; additional work not given to employees who are disorganized; dust and hygiene problems; the negative impression on customers; the negative reflection on the supervisor.





Question: We have a respect problem. It's my job to try to correct it, but how do I model respect? I know disrespect when I see it, but I don't know how to be strategic about this problem. Will employees even care?

Answer: Nearly all employees take behavioral cues from supervisors. How you act will set the stage for how employees in general will treat each other. You are an authority figure, and all employees learn early on to model the behavior of those who are in charge or are perceived as authority figures. To be strategic, consider the respectful behaviors you think need to be demonstrated. Demonstrations of respectful behavior in some areas will influence respectful behavior in other areas, so you don't have to consider every possible behavior. But start with these, and notice the impact over the ensuing weeks: Greet employees every day and be sincere when you do so. Express genuine concern for their interests and well-being. Give them a few moments to talk about their needs and what excites them. Really listen and make eye contact when you are spoken to. Compliment publicly when you see the opportunity so employees witness your positive behavior toward everyone on your staff. In particular, remark on the individual strengths specific employees demonstrate on the job.

Question: I don't hesitate to immediately go to employees and discuss performance issues when I see them. However, I often experience a lot of resistance and anger. What are some good tips on how to approach these discussions?

Answer: There are many techniques for giving feedback and doing it well can increase productivity, which is your goal. Assume that employees want feedback; many studies show that employees don't think they get enough. Supervisors who are feedback pros operate on the premise that most employees hired for their positions are fully capable of doing acceptable work, so feedback and correcting of performance become a partnership in communication, not a one-way attack. This mind-set includes investigating what employees think about their own performance, what guidance they are relying upon for what they are supposed to do, what changes you want, and your ability to explain specifically what you want the employee to do or produce.

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 1.800.765.0770

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