



# Solutions

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**Q** It seems like everyone is complaining about stress. What contributes to all these complaints? Is it just a popular thing to complain about? Is there an official definition of job stress? Also, what is the difference between job stress and just plain hard work?

**A.** We experience stress every day in our lives. Each person has a unique set of coping skills to effectively manage the sources of stress around us, including workplace stress. When our coping skills become overwhelmed, or ineffective, we begin to feel the sense that we are losing control and may feel increasingly helpless to do anything about it. Our bodies have a physiological response to stress and release hormones that may further impede our ability to focus and remain task oriented. For some, the act of complaining is an attempt to reassert control by voicing their displeasure without stating their struggles directly. As a manager, hearing employee complaints can indicate an employee is struggling to regain control over their work, and is having difficulty doing so. Perhaps it is because they are under resourced, lack training, not feeling well, or maybe there are other things going on in their life. Nonetheless, it is an opportunity to check in with the employee. Lastly, if appropriate, suggest contacting the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Human Resources, which can provide more information about coping skills and effective stress management techniques.

**Q** We are all doing more with less. Helping employees cope with this reality is the supervisor's job. I don't see this "more with less" trend changing. What guidance exists for supervisors on how to meet this modern challenge?

**A.** The answer to this question varies among employers. It is an important one to consider because employees will gravitate toward burnout, and it will affect the bottom line if there are no creative solutions. Turnover and low morale are two examples. Part of the answer lies in

helping employees help each other. This idea of developing a "high nurture" workforce focuses on employees improving communication, sharing skills, getting intra- and inter-organizational training, cooperating with each other more, solving problems together, inspiring and praising one another, recognizing and rewarding one another, processing stress together, and generally building cohesiveness. These "intangible efficiencies" are already proven ways of building and maintaining high morale and lowering the risk of burnout.

**Q** What are some of the award-winning characteristics of outstanding workplaces that include the role of the supervisor?

**A.** Many factors of the work culture link directly to supervisor behavior. These include:

- helping employees reduce bureaucratic roadblocks to their personal achievement;
- encouraging open dialogue and the debate of ideas;
- finding ways to help employees increase their knowledge;
- helping employees stay abreast of the latest twists in their fields;
- offering flexible work arrangements;
- fostering open communication;
- giving predictable feedback with multiple follow-up points for additional feedback prior to evaluations;
- fostering interdepartmental teamwork and understanding;
- mentoring;
- involving employees in a continual discussion about their future potential with the company;
- encouraging employee input about the future direction of the organization; and
- offering formal training to improve effective group and team relationships.

**Q** I know supervisors can't get involved in employees' personal problems, but if this is the EAP's expertise, what else can they discuss with supervisors? I don't really think about the EAP in any other way. Am I missing something?

**A.** Employee Assistance Programs are primarily known for helping employees resolve personal problems. However, EAPs were originally implemented for supervisors to consult with regarding conduct and behavioral issues affecting employee job performance. The connection between employees struggling with personal issues and its impact on their job performance is well known, however certain employee protections and workplace guidelines discourage supervisors to address employee personal matters directly.

EAPs are in a unique position to address both. This dual focus provides consultation to supervisors when developing plans to assist an employee's return to satisfactory performance, along with coordination of the employee's care relative to the performance problems and whatever personal issues may be contributing to it. Employees address these personal issues in a confidential environment. The EAP, with signed release from the employee, will follow up with a designated individual within the organization regarding compliance with the recommendations.

As with all employee performance concerns, each employee has a unique set of circumstances contributing to their job situation. Consultation with the EAP prior to, during and post EAP intervention positions the supervisors to effectively manage their employee without any discussion of personal matters.

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**APS Healthcare's Employee Assistance Program.** The EAP program through APS Healthcare assists organizations and their workforce in managing the personal challenges that impact employee well-being, performance and effectiveness. APS' life management consultants employ a comprehensive approach that identifies issues impacting the employee and assists them in developing meaningful solutions.

Please call the phone number below for more information about APS Healthcare and the services available to you.

 1-800-765-0770

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