

TIPS FOR SUPERVISORS

IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING TROUBLED EMPLOYEES

The HRS WorkLife Programs, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to aid staff members in seeking professional assistance to resolve employee problems. Early intervention prevents the problem from having a permanent impact on the employee's job performance. The EAP is a resource for supervisors to help retain valued employees, who with proper help can regain full productivity.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to become involved. Supervisors have a legitimate right to intervene when an employee's behavior is interfering with job performance.

GUIDELINES

1. **Establish objective** levels of work performance. For example: John Doe is expected to keep the kitchen dish area clean
2. **Measure, Evaluate and Record** job performance. Specific, behavioral criteria are necessary. For example: John Doe will wash all dishes and sweep the floor.
3. **Be Consistent** in your expectations of employees. For example: All employees with this classification will complete these tasks within the work day.
4. **Prompt feedback** to employees to communicate dissatisfaction and to seek solutions.
5. **Focus on performance Be Specific:** "John I noticed that you did not sweep today."
6. **Be Firm:** offer the staff member assistance. Avoid being an "armchair psychologist." For example:
Supervisor: "John I have noticed that you walked off the job today before the dishes were clean. This is the third time this week that you have done that. Are you having a problem which interferes with your getting the job done? If you are, we have an EAP who will help you. You can contact them yourself, or I will help you. You don't **have** to go to the EAP; however you do have to improve this problem."
7. **Be Honest**, speak with authority. **Supervisor:** "I value you as a person, however I expect you to complete your job duties of washing all the dishes and sweeping the floor."
8. **Prepare** to cope with resistance, denial, defensiveness, and even hostility. **John:** "You are always picking on me." "It's not my fault; Mary won't give me the dishes and then leaves me with a mess." **Supervisor:** "It may seem that I am picking on you, however I need to know if you are having a problem that is getting in the way of getting your job done. No matter what Mary does, it is still your responsibility to wash the dishes and sweep the floor."
9. **Get the employee to Accept Responsibility** for making behavioral changes in job performance.
Supervisor: "I want to clarify that it is your responsibility to get the dishes washed and sweep the floor. You can get help at the EAP with any personal problems you have." **John:** "I don't need the EAP, just because Mary won't give me the dishes!" **Supervisor:** "Going to the EAP is your choice, but Mary's job performance is my responsibility."
10. **Get a Commitment from the employee to improve specific behaviors:** **Supervisor:** "Here is a list of your job expectations, I will give you a copy and I will keep one. Do we have an agreement?"
11. **Follow-up:** Meet with employee after a specified amount of time. **Supervisor:** "We will meet next Friday to review your progress."

SUPPORTING A GRIEVING EMPLOYEE

Grief is a natural and necessary reaction to a significant change or loss. It may follow a crisis, or a traumatic life event. Reaction may be immediate or delayed, and take months or years to resolve. Recovery takes more than three working days. Grieving people share the following feelings: Shock and Denial, Anger, Guilt, Depression, and Acceptance.

How managers can support a grieving employee:

- Your caring support can set an example for other employees. It can be helpful during the healing process.
- Stay in touch with your employee, who has not yet returned to work. Connection with work may help the employee maintain some sense of their normal daily life.
- Acknowledge the loss. “I am sorry for your loss.” “I can’t imagine how difficult this is for you.” Avoid saying “This is God’s will” “I know just how you feel” “You can always get another dog, pet or child” “God never gives us more than we can handle.” It is important to listen and take your cue from the grieving employee. Expect to hear repetition of the story.
- Managers need to be aware of the delicate balance between, the employee’s need for support, the need to maintain a productive work environment, and the manager’s personal grief reaction.
- Educate oneself about the variety of events that can trigger grief. Some of these include the loss of a job, a family member, death of a pet, miscarriage, divorce, critical health concerns, a major disaster or any significant life transition.

When the Employee Returns to Work:

- Ask how you can help. Questions you might consider include:
- Would you like me to share any information with the others? If so, what information or details would you like them to know?
- Do you want to talk about your experience when you return, or would you prefer to concentrate on the work?
- Are you aware of any special needs at this time? Privacy? Initial reduced work hours? Help to catch up on your work?

The answers to the above questions may change on a daily basis in the beginning. Employee emotions are not yet stable. Keep asking the questions and listen to your employee’s response.

Offer the HRS WorkLife Programs, Employee Assistance Service as a resource.

SUPERVISOR'S ROLE

Our common goal is to establish a work environment that is healthy and productive for all employees. It is important for supervisors to focus on objective performance standards when evaluating an employee's job performance.

Observe

Troubled employees very often will exhibit changes in behavior that indicate personal problems are causing poor job performance. Here are some examples:

1. Frequent absence with vague excuses.
2. Excessive use of sick days
3. Pattern of unscheduled vacations.
4. Repeatedly coming to work late.
5. Repeated unannounced, early departures from work.
6. Taking unscheduled days off following a weekend, holiday or vacation.
7. Using up vacation days as soon as they are accrued.
8. Frequent and /or prolonged unannounced absences during assigned work hours.
9. Repeatedly missing scheduled staff functions or clients related activities.
10. Errors in judgment, which are inconsistent with past standards of good judgment.
11. Difficulty or failure to carry out routine instructions.
12. Erratic or deteriorating quality of performance when compared with past performance.
13. Overreacting to appropriate criticism.
14. Manipulating co-workers to take over assigned responsibilities.
15. Avoiding interaction with co-workers.
16. Appearing withdrawn or overly preoccupied.
17. Wide mood swings during the day for no apparent reason.
18. An increase in personal telephone calls causing repeated work interruptions.
19. Deteriorating hygiene or appearance.
20. Complaints by co-workers about employee's erratic behavior or lack of work cooperation.

DOCUMENT

The supervisor should write down specific information regarding performance problems. Complete and accurate documentation will enable a supervisor to:

1. Be objective, fair and consistent.
2. Present factual and objective information that gives the employee a clear picture of their job performance.
3. Prepare a written plan for corrective action. Documentation is necessary if disciplinary action is taken.

PREPARE

Supervisors should address only job-performance problems. Meeting with employees to discuss performance problems should be private. The supervisor should describe job performance problems in behavioral terms. Before meeting with your employee, discuss your observations and get support from your supervisor.

1. Meet and discuss with your immediate supervisor, the data collected and formulate a plan to approach the employee.
2. Contact and discuss the situation with the EAP counselor for additional suggestions, and support.

WHAT TO DO

1. Inform the employee of the purpose of the meeting.
2. Give the employee a copy of your documentation.
3. Be fair, firm and clear about what the employee is expected to do to improve their job performance.
4. Be a patient listener. Allow the employee an opportunity to explain their actions and what problems they are experiencing.
5. Get a commitment from the employee that they understand and accept the plan for improvement. Give them a copy of the plan.
6. Keep confidential any information the employee tells you about their personal problems.
7. Be consistent with workplace rules and regulations.
8. Set a reasonable date for a follow up meeting to review the employee's progress.
9. Provide information about the HRS WorkLife Programs, Employee Assistance Program. Inform the employee how they can contact EAP.
10. Inform the employee that they have the ultimate responsibility for the improvement of job performance.

WHAT NOT TO DO

1. Don't try to diagnose a personal/drug or alcohol problem.
2. Do not preach, lecture or "brow beat".
3. Do not be a manipulator.
4. Don't judge or moralize.
5. Don't threaten disciplinary action, unless there will be follow through.
6. Don't engage in rumors, deal only in facts.
7. Don't be diverted from the purpose of the meeting by arguing.
8. Don't accept excuses or alibis.
9. Don't engage in talk about the activities of other employees.
10. Don't set unreasonable goals for improvement. It took time for the problem to develop and it will take time to correct.

FOLLOW UP

Schedule a follow up meeting within 2-4 weeks after the initial performance evaluation. During the interim, continue to observe and document job performance. Follow up meetings with employees are important, because they enable both parties to assess improvement or lack of improvement. The outcome of a second meeting may be that no further meetings are needed or that subsequent ones would be useful.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of confronting an employee's poor job performance is to develop a positive plan of action for improvement. Good observation can result in early identification of problems. This provides the employee and supervisor with the maximum number of alternatives.

COMMON SUPERVISOR PITFALLS

Supervisors, working with troubled employees are sometimes reluctant to involve the HRS WorkLife Programs, Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Using the EAP as a resource can reduce supervisor anxiety and improve productivity as well as the general work environment. Listed below are some common pitfalls.

1. **OVERLY PROTECTIVE SUPERVISOR**

Sometimes supervisors think that referring someone to EAP may label the employee as a problem. The purpose of the EAP program is to help employees function better at work. The supervisor is often the first person who notices an employee with problems. Supervisors who offer the EAP to their workers show that they care about the well-being of their employees.

2. **GOOD WORKER**

Some supervisors shield employees because of past work performance. The supervisor think he/she could lose a “good worker” if a referral is made to EAP. These attitudes are unrealistic and unfair to the employee. Our common goal is to retain and support good employees.

3. **“IT’S MY PROBLEM, “I’LL SOLVE IT”**

Some supervisors believe it is their responsibility to handle and correct all problems in their area. Individuals with this perspective may view making an EAP contact as an admission of personal failure. This can result in a needless delay in getting an employee help. Supervisors should consider the financial cost to the University, as well as the personal liability they undertake by supporting an impaired employee.

4. **THE TIME EXCUSE**

A supervisor may hope a problem will work itself out given enough time. In the case of a temporary crisis that may be true. However, delaying a referral may increase the severity of some problems including depression, anxiety, and alcohol or drug abuse.

5. **FEAR OF MAKING A MISTAKE**

Supervisors who are uncertain about the source of a performance problem may fail to take action. The EAP can be helpful in planning a course of action. If you need help with a particular case, call the WorkLife Programs, Employee Assistance at 494-7707.

6. **STEREOTYPES**

Commonly held beliefs about alcoholism and mental illness make supervisors reluctant to refer an employee for help. The stigma regarding these medical conditions can be overcome by education. The EAP counselors are licensed mental health practitioners and can assess the problem, make referrals as necessary and educate employees about mental health issues.

7. **SUPERVISOR’S OWN PROBLEMS**

Supervisor’s may experience similar problems to those confronting employees. A supervisor with personal problems may be uncomfortable making a referral to EAP.