

MY supervisor newsletter

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How do I document an attitude problem so there is no uncertainty later about what I mean? What really bothers me most is the cynicism, eye rolling, and sighing.

Behaviors such as rolling one's eyes, sighing, and huffing may be triggering but are difficult to document. The key is discovering what is articulable and quantifiable and has an adverse impact. Do words like arrogant, aggressive, cynical, critical, indifferent, or rude describe your employee's attitude? If arrogance is descriptive, documentation might be: "John often demonstrates an exaggerated sense of his importance or abilities. For example, on (date, time) he remarked that 'everyone in the office is too lazy to learn the combination to the file cabinet,' so they 'rely on him' to open it in the morning. Such a statement has a negative effect on office morale and creates conflict." (Note how this example does not label the employee as "arrogant." You are using the definition of it followed by an example. This is more effective.) Formulate attitude documentation with 1) behavior associated with the attitude, 2) a description of what was said or what happened, and 3) its adverse impact. (Hint: The EAP can offer general guidance on documentation, and a dictionary may provide descriptive words you're searching for.)

I have referred many employees to the EAP over the years. I often notice the personal problem gets resolved, but performance also improves. This is expected, but it is often beyond what even I anticipated. What explains this surprising level of performance improvement after employees visit the EAP?

When employees participate in the EAP, they are not only assisted in resolving a personal problem, but may also need to participate in ongoing activities or personal efforts to maintain and improve mental and physical wellness. Preventing relapse of a substance use disorder especially requires a lot of self-care for the patient/employee. This may include focusing on improving one's diet, attention to health needs, better stress management, chronic disease education, better problem-solving, psychotherapy, goal setting, work-life balance, and attending to relationship problems at home, the continuation of which would jeopardize recovery. It is sometimes said that employees who visit the EAP for help with a personal problem get "better than well." This is the phenomenon you are witnessing.

I am a new supervisor. What supervisory skills can the EAP best help me develop if I get into situations or experience problems I can't manage properly?

There are many skills a supervisor needs in order to be effective. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the specific skill that is lacking in order to address a particular problem. This is where the EAP might help. For example, if morale in your work unit is an issue, and you don't see it improving, is it because you lack effective communication skills? Are interpersonal skills the problem? Could you improve your conflict resolution skills? Then again, is it possible the morale problem is mostly out of your control? Use the EAP to help you troubleshoot issues you experience on the job, particularly interpersonal, intrapersonal, and soft-skill-related issues. The EAP may help you with personal issues, refer you to effective skill development resources, or even send you back to your supervisor or the organization for coaching or mentorship, but with clarification of your needs.

What is the underlying reason some supervisors bully employees? Is it insecurity or psychological problems? And what are the most common types of bullying behaviors exhibited by supervisors?

Most supervisors do not bully employees because they are insecure or have psychological problems. Instead, research appears to show motivation to bully is predominantly driven by the need to control subordinates and fear that they won't successfully do it without being intimidating. Research also shows that some supervisors feel better and get an energy boost from intimidating others, but the penalties arrive shortly in the form of poor productivity, morale problems, and turnover – everything a supervisor doesn't want!

The most common types of bullying include 1) yelling at employees or speaking to them in a way that causes them to feel intimidated; 2) making inappropriate personal criticisms; 3) giving unreasonable deadlines and work; 4) showing favoritism toward only certain workers; 5) constantly criticizing; 6) threatening employees with disciplinary action or termination (e.g., "I'm going to write you up!"); and 7) micromanaging (nitpicking and controlling the details after delegating work).

<https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2017/abusive-bosses-experience-short-lived-benefits>

I referred my employee to the EAP for being quarrelsome with coworkers. I don't know what the underlying issues were with this employee, but the program worked! After nine months, the EAP still lets me know the employee is participating in the program. Is this necessary?

It is likely the EAP made a decision that feedback to you would be important to help the employee remain both focused and motivated to continue treatment or involvement in whatever help was determined necessary. The leverage of the formal referral you made, which employees always perceive to be linked to their job security (whether stated by you or not), is what created (or helped create) a sense of urgency to get help for the quarrelsome behavior. Dozens of health issues or conditions could contribute to such behavior: poor sleep, chronic pain, depression, alcoholic withdrawal, and a plethora of psychological issues or habits of communication. Be sure to periodically praise the employee's performance and cooperation with others at work. Realize that the role of a manager in influencing the employee's productivity and wellness doesn't end after the referral. Instead, it is often the beginning

Please call our EAP professionals for advice on confronting and referring troubled employees to the EAP. We will assist you in developing action plans and coach you toward successful confrontations. This is part of your service with MYgroup.

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