

# MY supervisor newsletter

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I have an employee with behavioral issues. I have not made a formal EAP referral because I fear he will quit if I do. He can go anywhere, and I can't afford to lose him. Employees sometimes complain about his behavior and attitude, but I can see they have also adapted. Should I still take some action?

Consult with the EAP to change this status quo. Left unchanged, you risk an eventual crisis or disruptive event from this situation growing worse. Effects on coworkers and yourself are likely far reaching. This troubled employee has lost the trust of his peers, and this adversely affects workplace communication. Reduced cooperation negatively affects innovation, outputs, outcomes, and productivity. Teams also make suboptimum decisions when they are not working well together. Your performance is also affected because your leadership will be devalued by your subordinates for your failure to act. Trust in your abilities erodes. Rumors spread. And your reputation suffers with upper management. To cope, you may begin thinking about quitting, thereby harming your career. Likewise, you are likely to lose income opportunities because of management deciding that you can't lead properly. The EAP is your first stop for help in developing a referral plan.

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I am referring my employee to the EAP. He is very cooperative and anxious to see the EA professional. I am impressed that he is so open about his problems with cocaine. With such motivation, should I still send documentation about his performance issues?

Yes, pass along information related to job performance to the EAP. Your employee should also possess the same information. Also, phone the EAP to discuss the referral, if practical, because there are typically nuances associated with any troubled employee's communication and relationship style that are easier to understand when discussed. Note that employees with illicit drug addiction problems survive by lying and manipulation. It is part of the lifestyle. Your employee may be sincere; however, addicts are fearful of giving up drug use, and statements or behaviors that appear sincere are frequently deceptions. Your employee may only be planning the next step of evading treatment. All of this is quite normal, and the addiction treatment community is aware of these behaviors. Treatment can work, even for the most deceptive addict, because a combination of unabated real-life consequences and accurate information about addiction treatment and recovery combine to produce an individual truly dedicated to recovery and sobriety.

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I have two employees with a personality clash. Periodically I succeed in getting them to cooperate, but it doesn't "stick." Soon they are back at each other's throats. What is the pre-

There is no preferred method for referring employees in conflict to the EAP, but most EA professionals can recommend an approach based on their past success at conflict resolution. Consult with the EAP to offer background information and plan the referral. Be careful not to see conflict as "the problem." This view of conflict can unwittingly allow you to tolerate it for years because the root causes of conflict are ignored. Conflicts between employ-

ferred method for referring them to the EAP?

ees are usually symptoms of other issues requiring intervention or personal change. If you decide to refer employees individually, you may discover that venting and sharing each one's individual stories in private with the EAP produce an almost immediate cessation of tension. Be assured that it is temporary. However, when each employee is feeling supported and aligned with the EAP, the next step of engagement can proceed. Usually EAPs quickly have clarity about the general path toward resolution with the above approach.

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Is it helpful for supervisors to discuss their personal problems with subordinates as a way of appearing more "human" and building rapport? The idea seems sound because showing oneself to be vulnerable allows employees to feel more at ease, right?

**Management and** supervisory skill development authors have debated the merits of supervisors sharing personal information with subordinates, and in particular, information related to personal problems or shortcomings. Employees may feel more at ease with such supervisors, but research does not show this translates to increased productivity. In fact, participating in this type of relationship can undermine the employment dynamic, which naturally includes a healthy sense of urgency to focus on one's essential job functions with due regard to the manager to whom one is accountable. When supervisors have personal problems, the best source of support and focused help is, of course, the EAP. Build rapport with employees by identifying needs, developing their talents, and helping them find meaning in their jobs.

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I am a new supervisor. I have never had training, and I can tell that this new position will be me learning everything the hard way. I bought a few books and I found some courses online, but what will be the most likely mistakes I will make? If I know what they are, perhaps I will make fewer.

**Most managers** learn by doing and by the mistakes they make. But there are important things to remember: 1) Keep employees informed, let them know what the intentions are for the work unit, and do what you say you are going to do; 2) Keep information flowing. Workplace communication is the number one complaint of employees and managers alike. You can't overstate its importance; 3) Put more time into knowing and engaging with your employees than remaining busy in your office; 4) Use your expertise to solve group problems, not to show how much you know. Develop your employees as the experts; 5) Don't seek acceptance by becoming friends with employees but by having effective workplace relationships; 6) Learn the art of feedback and timely praise and how to make it meaningful, and create change with it; and 7) Consult with mentors on any of the above, and use the EAP when the going gets tough.

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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 EAP service with McLaughlin Young.

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