

SOLUTIONS

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Question: One of my employees is resigning from the company. I am glad because this person has been slow moving and underperforming for a long time. I blame myself because I adapted to the performance issues as they grew worse, rather than intervene. How can I prevent this from happening in the future?

Answer: The easy answer is start earlier in confronting employees with performance issues, but this may be too simplistic to inspire you to change. To help you act sooner, ask yourself what parts of your current job you dislike the most and if those things are related to employee performance issues. Do you dislike dealing with angry customers? Do you dread meetings with your boss to explain low production numbers? Do you work extra hours away from your family to catch up? Are other workers angry over the leniency you've shown? These are only a few outcomes from this type of neglect. Some managers believe that if they can cope with an employee's poor performance, then nothing needs to be done about it. They forget that lower revenue, sales and profitability, along with mass departure of high-performing employees, are potential consequences of allowing poor performers to continue—the issues snowball. Try contacting your Employee Assistance Program to learn more about your reluctance to confront employees.

Question: I'm a concerned manager and want my employees to come to work every day enjoying what they do, and feel like I am measuring up to their expectations as a great supervisor. How do the most successful managers accomplish this?

Answer: Employees are resources to the companies, and because they are paid for what they do, a partnership or contract exists to provide them with benefits in exchange for work. Frequently, managers and business organizations get stuck within this model trying to help employees feel motivated by looking to the benefits, rewards and tangibles to keep them happy and loyal to the organization. But this is only half of the picture. The other half is an effective relationship employees have with the organization. It is also part of the contract, although much of it or perhaps none is in writing. You're the closest representative of that relationship. Meeting employees' needs in this part of the loyalty equation requires things that are harder to produce for some managers. They include getting closer to the employee by offering coaching assistance for career goals, helping employees connect with mentors, giving them lots of feedback, and ensuring that no "trees" are growing between you and them by keeping the communication channels open and demonstrating that you are empathetic to their needs.



Question: There are a million resources online to help employees with everything from being assertive to managing stress to dealing with sleep problems and improving relationships. What benefit is the EAP if all it takes is Googling a topic to get help?

Answer: There are many helpful resources online, but unfortunately, it's hard to know which ones to trust. Some of them could actually be harmful or hazardous. But even those that are well-established and reputable have limitations and do not match the services and benefits of EAP assessment and referral. Helping employees entails understanding the nature of a personal problem, providing motivational counseling and keeping the ball rolling with follow-up. Often, determining the nature of a problem is difficult, and the proper treatment may need to be thoroughly examined so there is a successful problem-solution match. Symptoms of a problem may be plain to see, and employees may argue strongly to treat them in a predetermined manner. This is not a combination that lends itself well to Googling a solution. It can be a sure path to failure in treating the true problem and in returning the employee to a level of satisfactory performance.

Question: Most of the employees that I supervise are sales personnel and customer service representatives. EAPs aren't sales experts, so when it comes to improving the skills of my staff when they have problems with customers, can the EAP still be a valuable resource for me or them?

Answer: Although EAPs are not trained specifically in the fields of sales and customer service, they may still be able to help. This help includes imparting "soft skills" that affect your bottom line. Do you have employees who habitually struggle with

keeping their cool to avoid arguing with customers? Do some employees not grasp how important it is to be successful with customers rather than right? Would you like to see your employees demonstrate more empathy toward customers by using active listening skills? This is the ability to show by one's behavior that a customer's needs or complaints are heard and understood. The ability to adapt to personality styles of customers and communicate effectively in sales presentations is another area to explore. Consider performance issues and talk to the EAP about the possibilities. Everyone may benefit, including the bottom line.

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

Answer: Sometimes the correction of performance must be done quickly. It's important to expect employees to accept the correction and move on with their work. There are many techniques for giving feedback, however; it's almost an art. 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.

Question: My employee complains about a coworker who asks too many personal questions. The employee might be asked, “What did you do this weekend?” “What about Friday night?” “Who do you socialize with?” etc. It’s not sexual harassment, but should I intervene?

Answer: Your employee should be assertive and communicate that these personal questions are unwanted. If the questioning continues, other actions can be considered to make the behavior stop. The rule that “no means no” applies to many types of behavior that can be labeled as harassment if it doesn’t stop. Most employees read “social cues” well and after one round of such questions without the anticipated responses would give up fast. This is normal social interaction, and all of us must acquire these skills so we can interact civilly with each other. However, some employees for a variety of reasons are less adept at knowing when they are violating these social norms and going over the line. They require a clearer message. Consider a supervisor referral to the EAP as part of your intervention strategy should the behavior continue.

Question: My employee isn’t insubordinate when I make a request, but there are always complaints, resistance to details, problems with timing, and criticism about my communication. After all this, the employee delivers superior performance. How can I manage this?

Answer: Although your employee is great with a task, you are not describing superior performance. Quarrelsome behavior interferes with orderly work flow and is therefore serious. These kinds of communication patterns between managers and subordinates are not unusual. They can take years to develop and can become habits that are difficult to break. They are comparable to the bickering

communication patterns found between spouses, and over time the psychology that influences them can be similar. Still, you may agree that the relationship is valued. Beyond requiring that the quarrelsome behavior stop, establish new rules that must be followed and that will permit orderly discussion of work issues. The requirement that your employee put concerns in writing, for example, may impose an intervention that produces its own cure. However, the most important strategy is looking at how you contribute to its perpetuation and wanting change badly enough to follow through. Consider using the EAP for coaching assistance.

Question: My employee holds a key public safety position, and I received a report from a coworker that he is not cooperating with the EAP’s recommendations since his formal referral. My last report from the EAP is good, so should I ignore this hearsay information?

Answer: Your first consideration is the safety of others, so approach this issue from that standpoint. Start by asking your employee in a follow-up meeting if he is still cooperating with the EAP’s recommendations. This isn’t a personal discussion of his issues; it is a business matter related to the agreement you have with him. Let your supervisor be aware of what has been reported. Also, let the EAP know what has been reported. The EAP will likely take some extra steps to follow up in a way that further verifies cooperation. Your question is a good one because it requires some deliberation about how to respond to hearsay information. Some supervisors might hastily presume that such a report can be dismissed outright, but the safety issues require that it be handled in a different way.



Question: I have employees who can't write effectively. Written projects, emails and other types of communication are embarrassing my department. Can the EAP assist, or is this a problem EAPs don't address?

Answer: The criterion for a supervisor referral to the EAP is an employee with a performance problem. Typically, this person is not improving despite your attempts to correct the problem. True, referring an employee to the EAP because he or she can't write well is not an everyday occurrence, but it still fits the criterion. Not only are remedial courses available in the community, but online resources are also available. The problem of employees having deficient writing skills is not new, but with improvements in technology, the resources to address it are growing. One recent survey by Public Agenda found that 73 percent of employers report that high school graduates are deficient in their writing skills. The necessity of employers to have a competitive workforce underscores the need for addressing this concern.

Question: My employee is hospitalized following a suicide attempt and has asked me to visit. Discharge is in a few days. I don't want to visit this person at a psychiatric unit. I want to be supportive, but frankly, I don't feel comfortable with the request. Should I go anyway?

Answer: Visiting an employee in a hospital is not an uncommon event for supervisors, but since it is probably not related to an essential function of your position, it's reasonable to use your own judgment about what to do. There are other ways to express your sentiments, and a get-well card is certainly the most conventional and appropriate. If you remain unsure about what to do and would like to consider visiting, discuss your ambivalence with the EAP. You will gain clarity, and you will feel better about whatever decision you make.

To speak with an EAP professional,
or for TDD Access, please call:
866.598.3978

