

# Supervisor/HR Newsletter

## Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program

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## Motivation Meltdown

Are the dog days of summer taking a toll on your staff's creativity and productivity? Try one of these strategies to reenergize your workplace:

### **Get outside**

Who doesn't want to be outdoors on a beautiful day? Exchange the wistful looks out the window for some actual fresh air. Encourage workers to take a laptop to an outdoor café or return calls via cellphone at a nearby park. Watch attention spans increase by moving a staff meeting outside. "So often, the best way to up productivity and rekindle creativity is to simply step outside the office for a couple minutes," says Deborah Sweeney, CEO of MyCorporation.com. "During the summer months, my employees and I will sometimes take walks to Starbucks or Menchie's for a cool treat. Just enjoying some fresh air and getting moving can do wonders for your body and mind."

### **Go on a field trip**

Remember the grade-school excitement of going someplace? Adults crave deviation from routine, too. "I recently went rock climbing with my team, and it helped give us the extra burst of energy and excitement that we needed," says Elana Winchester, communications and marketing coordinator at Areyvut, Inc. "Not only was it a fun activity and a form of exercise, but after the completion of the activity we discussed as a group how rock climbing can teach us lessons to utilize in the workplace. We discussed how it takes teamwork and encouragement to get tasks done and also discovered how, just like one can reach the top of the wall using many different paths, so too an assignment can be completed using many different avenues."

### **Allow flex work**

Focusing on results rather than hours clocked can motivate employees to do more—and they'll appreciate your consideration of their other obligations. "Employees need flexibility in order to achieve work/life balance, especially during the summer when children are out of school and child care often falls to the working parent," says Deb LaMere, vice president of employee engagement. "Allow for flexible work options, like regularly working from home a few days a week or letting employees head out a few hours early, as long as their work is completed. When you give flexibility, you get better results—not just during the summer, but year-round."

### **Encourage creativity**

Look at times when staff is lean as a chance to focus on the ones still there. Teaching an individual a new task, letting someone try a different responsibility, or simply seeking out a person's thoughts over a casual lunch can keep engagement high. Tim Elmore, president of Growing Leaders, suggests taking advantage of the slow time to give employees freedom for creative projects. "Allowing team members to work on whatever they want allows them to take initiative, be creative, and produce something on their own. Progressive companies like 3M and Google have found success in offering employees time to work on a project of their choosing, and as a result, it helps them feel more engaged, in control, and also inspired through innovation."

### **Set challenging goals**

Sometimes a summer slump can result from low expectations during that season. Raising the bar can be the cure. "Challenge your team to make summer the best quarter of the year," says Geoff Gross, president and CEO of Medical Guardian. "Set performance goals and offer employees an immediate and meaningful target to work toward. Make sure everyone understands the goals and what their relative priority is."

### **Try an incentive**

Finally, don't discount good old-fashioned rewards for outstanding performance. "I recently introduced our 'beer money bonus' incentive for my team," says Chris Post, CEO and founder of Post Modern Marketing. "It's an extra \$20 for the weekend if they go the extra mile for the client, improve a company process, or just come up with a great idea. As a result, we have already found a few ways to complete tasks faster and cheaper."

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# Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee Conversations

Misunderstandings, disagreements, and even occasional conflict are a normal part of every manager's relationship with their employees. Since the quality of manager – employee relationships is a key factor in employee morale and productivity, how a manager handles difficult conversations with their staff members is a crucial part of their success as a leader.

## ***Don't rush through difficult conversations***

Any conversation that is highly emotional, where the stakes are high, or are in any other way stressful to either the manager or the employee are going to be challenging. It's important for managers to realize that these conversations need to be approached carefully and skillfully and should not be rushed through. Because leaders are typically very busy, there is often a tendency to have brief, rushed conversations that can be ineffective and even damaging to the employee – manager relationship.

## ***Prerequisites to a successful conversation***

It's important to choose the right time and place to have the conversation. If the topic to be discussed is potentially stressful, be sure to allocate enough time. 15 minutes is a good rule of thumb for a conversation that has potentially stressful content. If a manager doesn't have at least 15 minutes to allow the employee to discuss the topic thoroughly with them, it's better to choose a different time for the interaction. Remember also to choose a location that's comfortable for both you and the employee. Your office may not be the best place. A neutral location like a coffee shop might be more comfortable for the employee.

## ***Effective approaches***

Once you've chosen the right time and place, below are some tips for having an effective conversation with the employee:

- *Speak the truth respectfully* – always remember to be respectful as you interact with the employee. Even if you disagree with them, do it respectfully. The employee may not get what they want from the conversation, but if you are respectful to their opinions, etc., they will typically still see you as a supervisor who is trying to be reasonable and fair.
- *Seek first to understand, then be understood* – Let the employee go first in the conversation. Hear them out. Don't interrupt as they express themselves. Dale Carnegie Training says that a caring manager is the key to having an engaged employee. There's no better way to demonstrate caring than by listening well to your employees.
- *Take a positive approach* – Go into the conversation being as positive as possible. Even if you have to discipline the employee for a performance problem, try to do it in a constructive, positive way. Be encouraging (i.e., "we all make mistakes" or "let's see this situation as a growth opportunity"), to help the employee remain hopeful and motivated to move forward.

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# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.



**Q. What if I refer an employee to the EAP and they don't think they need it? Isn't it important for the employee being referred to somewhat believe they need help so it is not a waste of the EAP's time?**

A. The EAP would not consider it a waste of time to meet with an employee who at first appears unmotivated, in denial, or otherwise convinced they do not need help. The important issue is whether the employee came of their own volition. Regarding motivation, desire, and insight—these often arrive later by way of an assessment and use of interviewing techniques called motivational counseling. It is quite normal for troubled employees to walk into an EAP office with one or more of three common

viewpoints: 1) It's my supervisor's fault—I am not the one with the problem; 2) I am only here because I was told I had to come; and 3) I have no idea why I am here. All three of these are standard fare for EAPs, and EA professionals know how to address each one.

**Q. Why should supervisors consult with the EAP early in the process of managing troubled employees? Sometimes I work with an employee for months or perhaps a year before deciding to involve the EAP.**

A. The rationale for consulting with EAPs early is one of risk reduction as much as it is helping the employee. You are only human, and over the course of months or even years of engaging with a potentially manipulative worker, you are at risk for saying and doing things that may not be in the best interest of yourself or the organization. These behaviors could prompt employment or legal claims stemming from your emotional reactions, exchanges, or mismanaged responses to the employee's problems. Engaging with the EAP helps you avoid emotional hooks early because you feel the EAP's support. This way you keep a cooler head and make more levelheaded decisions. EAPs have a lot of experience, and as they hear stories about troubled employees, they can often make early guesses about the nature of problems. Consulting with the EAP therefore results in earlier referral, saving you time and hassle that could last years.

**Q. Is it unfair to consider my employee lazy rather than a troubled worker when this sort of behavior seems long-term—almost part of his or her personality? Should I believe instead that there is always an explanation for what appears to be laziness, and just refer the employee to the EAP?**

A. Laziness is associated with behaviors that can be measured. Focus on those, not the label. Consider a few supervisory interventions before making your referral. 1) Ask your employee why he or she is disinclined to work, participate in work activities with more vigor, or exert him- or herself to get the job done. 2) Have a discussion with your employee about his or her job description. Does he or she really know what it is? Delve deeper and ask your employee what he or she thinks the job entails. Answers to these questions will tell you a great deal about this problem. 3) Decide on what constitutes satisfactory performance and give your employee a project. Over a period of weeks, watch for quantifiable issues that demonstrate problematic behaviors. 4) Discover through conversation what motivates your employee, and use these things as rewards for the completion of work assignments. 5) Examine the work environment, too, but be cautious with this one. Accepting the employee's analysis that the organization is to blame is a dead end in helping the employee. Refer the employee to the EAP if changes are not forthcoming.

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