

Supervisor/HR Newsletter

Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program

Public Employee Benefits Alliance

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Page 1



Is It Assertiveness or Aggressiveness?



It's important to hold your ground in a tough office environment without coming across as angry or aggressive. Knowing where the line is between assertive and aggressive can make or break your career, say business experts. Assertiveness is an important skill that's necessary for running a team or advancing your career, while aggression stems from disrespecting boundaries and getting overly frustrated in the workplace.

Body language can be a key to identifying aggression, says entrepreneur Karen James. Aggressive people may make strong physical and verbal gestures as they communicate, such as swearing or pounding a table. Their faces may turn red, too.

If you're inspiring fear rather than respect, that can be a sign that you've crossed the line into aggression, says Bridget Loudon, Expert360.

Making threats is definitely an aggressive tactic, says behavioral researcher Dan Gregory.

Being assertive, on the other hand, is based in rational, clear communication and is focused on outcomes and actions, not personalities. It also doesn't involve blame or emotions, says executive coach Virginia Mansell. Putting your feelings aside and focusing on how actions affect the organization can help you stay assertive without getting aggressive.

If you're working in an aggressive office, you might find yourself taking on aggressive tendencies in self-defense. Try to stick with clear, unemotional language when communicating, and keep things professional instead of crossing boundaries by swearing or using other threatening language or gestures.

Source: <http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/41668/is-it-assertiveness-or-aggressiveness>



Maintaining a Psychologically Healthy Workplace

Since 2006, the American Psychological Association (APA) has been presenting National Psychologically Healthy Workplace Awards in the US to recognize organizations for their efforts to foster employee health and well-being while enhancing organizational performance.

As part of the award evaluation process, the APA assesses an organization's efforts in five different key areas as follows:

- *Employee Involvement* – Soliciting input from employees and involving them in decision-making improves engagement. Involving employees in this way can increase productivity and help to reduce turnover.
- *Work-Life Balance* – Programs and policies that facilitate work-life balance acknowledge that employees have responsibilities and lives outside of work, and help individuals to better meet those demands. Efforts to help employees improve their work-life balance can increase job satisfaction and their commitment to the organization.
- *Employee Growth and Development* – Providing opportunities for employees to expand their knowledge, skills and abilities can translate into positive gains for the organization. By creating an environment that supports employee growth and development, the organization will be better able to attract and retain top quality employees.
- *Health and Safety* – Health and safety efforts such as the implementation of an employee wellness program, access to health and fitness centers, and offering comprehensive group health benefits can help an organization to reduce health care costs and absenteeism.
- *Employee Recognition* – Consistent recognition and communication of appreciation of employee efforts is a key to maintaining a motivated workforce. Recognition makes employees feel valued and appreciated, and can result in increased levels of engagement and productivity.

While your organization may not be competing at this point for the APA's National Award, putting focus on these key areas will help to enhance the culture in your organization which can lead to improvements in employee morale, productivity, and retention.

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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 should I measure to know if my work unit is characterized as having “good communication?” I would like to gauge the quality of communication and then respond accordingly, if needed.

A. A work unit characterized by good communication will typically demonstrate strong employee engagement, high morale, and the ability to witness a competitive spirit among a productive group of people. One or more of these things is usually adversely affected when internal communication suffers. Delving deeper, the most commonly cited employee complaints linked to problematic communication are information flow between management and line staff, and lack of recognition and praise for employees. When you have a troubled employee or an employee who is not performing to expected standards, always analyze at least those couple of factors mentioned above and the role they might play in your approach to correcting performance.

Q. We have some pretty uncivil people in our workplace. I’m not talking about bullying, but instead nasty notes, silent treatments, withholding information, or not inviting someone to lunch. What can supervisors do? Perhaps I am just oversensitive and shouldn’t care.

A. Lost productivity, diminished employee loyalty, and turnover costs all stem from incivility in the workplace. Workplace incivility often stems from the absence of visible, proactive leadership and regular communication. If you have characteristically been visibly absent or you seldom meet to discuss team issues, start doing so. You may see some of these behaviors instantly stop. Employees take their cues from you on how to speak, behave, and engage with others. They notice your attitude, demeanor, personality, disposition, and how you treat others. All of these things play a role in influencing their behavior. You possess a natural form of power that comes from the right to be in charge, make decisions, and enforce standards. This is wonderful leverage for creating a positive work environment. Incivility is motivated by the desire to exert power over another, demonstrate frustration, or attain something desired. Tell employees you want a more civil workplace and expect it to happen. You will be surprised at how fast things can turn around.

Q. I read recently that depression may be contagious or an infectious disease. How is this possible?

A. Major depression affects 15-20 percent of the population. A research report from Stony Brook University in November received widespread attention because its author supported further investigation into the possibility that major depression could be the result of “some parasitic, bacterial, or viral infection” not yet identified. Infectious was mischaracterized as contagious in other media. The two do not necessarily equate. Not long ago, stomach ulcers were determined to be caused by H. pylori bacteria, not stress. The idea is similar. With regard to the workplace, many studies have shown that employee morale can be affected by the attitudes and behaviors of coworkers. In this sense, depression’s effects can be “contagious” if behavioral issues of those affected by it influence others and negatively impact morale or productivity. Rely on the EAP when you are concerned about an employee’s behavior.

Information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Some of it might not apply to your particular company policies and available programs. This information is proprietary and intended only for eligible EAP members. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.