



# THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER

Public Employee Benefits Alliance

HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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## March Online Seminar

### *Your Routine Financial Check-up*

Examine your finances from a variety of perspectives, and review and prioritize all of your debts as you explore your assets.

Available on-demand starting  
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## 2018 Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series & Leadership Certificate Program

### Schedule

February 23rd, 26th: *Preparing to Lead Effectively*  
April 20th, 23rd: *Relationship Excellence for Managers*  
June 15th, 18th: *How to Motivate Employees from Different Generations*  
August 17th, 20th: *How to Effectively Delegate Tasks & Responsibilities*  
October 19th, 22nd: *How to Become a Better Coach*  
December 14th, 17th: *Strengthening the Team*

Links to sign up for each session are provided on the Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series & Leadership Certificate Program Flyer.

Helpline: 866-327-2400  
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# Managing Employee Burnout

## **Burnout may depend as much on individual employees' personalities as on the workplace.**

Employees who push themselves hard probably have set high goals for themselves for years; what you see is the cumulative result of being exhausted by achievement. These people can become drained from the sustained excitement and adrenaline levels of challenging themselves.

Employees who measure their progress in the organization against their own internal timeline may be comparing their work lives to that of a parent, sibling, or friend ("When my mother was 35, she was already ..."). Or perhaps they are thinking about their own goals, and what they want to achieve by a certain age. If this kind of anxiety is the trouble, the employee may need help assessing whether or not the expectations are realistic. These employees may need encouragement to help them set reasonable short-term goals.

## **Burnout can also come from stresses in employees' home lives.**

Employees who feel they have too much going on in their lives are increasingly common. When a heavy workload is added to many family responsibilities, the result can be absenteeism, plummeting productivity, and burnout. Talk to the employee about how home life may be influencing work and vice versa. Investigate possible solutions, including flex time or job sharing.

Employees who feel fatigued are also common. Fatigue and depression are among top reasons that people say they go to physicians. Encourage the employee to seek medical attention, if necessary. If feasible, create the opportunity for the employee to get exercise during the day.

## **Burnout that affects a number of employees and is the result of workplace stress may benefit from intervention strategies.**

- Work to clarify responsibilities so that each worker's duties are well defined.
- Set up a Stress Relief Suggestion Box so employees can participate in addressing the causes and levels of office stress.
- Support employees' healthy choices. Create support groups for people who are trying to quit smoking, or offer free and healthy office snacks.
- Promote stress awareness through reminders in a newsletter or e-mail.

## **Employees may benefit from knowing that their well-being is important to their employer.**

If employees know that you care about their stress levels, it's more likely that they'll respond well to intervention strategies. Valuing employee health is especially important in work cultures that glamorize the ability to handle heavy workloads. Remind your employees that relieving their stress is important, too.

## How can employers help to prevent employee burnout?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer, but here are several strategies:

### *Make sure it's not your fault.*

Ask whether something is wrong with the job when an employee suffers burnout, especially when it happens to several employees in the same job. Understaffing, long hours, high stress—all are conditions that can eventually overwhelm even the best employees. Make sure it isn't the job that needs fixing before you try solutions that focus on employees.

### *The Mini Sabbatical Solution*

For employees who push themselves, low-pressure assignments usually aren't the answer; an unchallenging assignment will probably be seen as an insult. Instead, try offering this type of employee a short-term sabbatical (two to six weeks long). The employee should be encouraged to pursue an activity that refreshes his or her motivation and creativity. You might advise your employee to take a class, do research, or pursue professional development off-site.

### *The Executive Involvement Solution*

For employees who feel like their ambitions are hitting organizational walls, being asked to participate in development and decision-making can often help relieve burnout. Some managers recruit their most talented people to become part of an executive council that assesses the organization's future, plans effective customer service, and advises senior managers on how to get the most from the work force while building morale and team spirit. When talented people are brought into the highest levels of creative planning and decision-making, they have a reason to keep their skills sharp and to resist burnout.

### *The "Cafeteria" Solution*

Organizations can ease the burnout-inducing burdens of family responsibilities without breaking the budget by installing so-called cafeteria benefits plans. You can give employees a menu of benefit choices. They can then determine which combination of programs will help them to meet their family or personal responsibilities.

Typical cafeteria benefits plans include the following

- Resource and referral services for child care and eldercare
- Onsite or offsite child care or elder care facilities (often shared with other area companies)
- Provisions for sick-child visitation and daycare by a medically trained caregiver
- Substance abuse assistance
- Alternative work schedules (including compressed workweeks, flex-time, and telecommuting)

### *The Caring Organization Solution*

Promote an organization-wide culture of health, in which all employees are urged to take physical and emotional well-being seriously. The organization can provide stress-reduction seminars, exercise and weight-reduction sessions, healthy food in the cafeteria, and a general atmosphere of openness and sharing about personal feelings and physical problems. Accommodations can be as simple as understanding that a group of exercising employees needs an additional 15 minutes at lunch twice a week to complete their regimen or that a smoke-free workplace, including restrooms, will help employees who are trying to kick the habit.

*Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). Managing employee burnout. Raleigh, NC: Author.*

# 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. I am feeling guilty because we dismissed an employee for performance issues. I did not refer him to the EAP. Assuming he had no personal problems, what else could I have done to help him resolve his performance issues?*

A. When you work with an employee's performance issues, have several very short meetings, perhaps 20 minutes or so, during the year, in which you discuss the standards of performance you require. Share notes and examine parameters such as quality of work, quantity of work, attendance and availability, responsibility and dependability, use of time, cooperation, initiative, personal appearance, ability to accept feedback (constructive criticism), and appearance. Agree on what constitutes outstanding performance (what it actually looks like on each essential element chosen). Also determine what constitutes above average, standard, below standard, and unsatisfactory. At each meeting, discuss where the employee believes he or she falls within these ranges for each item. Also discuss what is needed to reach the next level. This engagement supplies urgency and motivation for most employees to keep their performance improvement top of mind. Without short-term, periodic discussions that are quantifiable, as described, the likelihood of performance deteriorating further is higher. Refer the employee to the EAP at any point, but encourage a self-referral at the very beginning.

*Q. My employee periodically visits the EAP, but this has been going on for a year. I thought EAPs are short-term assessments?*

A. The EAP may meet with employees periodically to discuss their progress in treatment or counseling, or to evaluate how well they are following through with other recommendations. Recovery from certain illnesses like alcoholism takes work, lots of dedication to a recovery program, and support with overcoming challenges, stressors, and life events that can precipitate relapse. Periodic meetings with EAP clients are typically on an as-needed basis with those who may be considered more at-risk for recurring problems related to job performance or issues originally addressed in the first appointment. An employee who is not following through with a doctor or community treatment program's recommendation may be asked by the EAP to come to an appointment to better understand difficulties the employee may be having with attendance, participation, or cooperation with the provider.

*Q. Can you discuss what supervisors accidentally or unwittingly do when referring employees to the EAP that undermines employee participation, or inhibits employees from actually going to or taking advantage of the program?*

A. Common mistakes supervisors make when referring employees to the EAP that undermine the EAP's ability to help employees include: 1) Not communicating to the employee that the EAP is confidential and that the supervisor is not going to receive personal information about the employee from the EAP. 2) Not displaying a positive attitude about the EAP and its capabilities at the time of referral that "market" its benefits. 3) Failing to provide information in writing to the EAP about performance issues discussed with the employee. (Absent this documentation, the employee commonly brings a different agenda to the EAP, or disagrees with performance issues paraphrased by the EAP as he or she understands them.) 4) Not completing the communication loop to discover whether the employee made it to the appointment, if the EAP does not phone to confirm it as expected.

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