THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER

Public Employee Benefits Alliance

HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

May 2020

May Online Seminar

*Accepting Aging:
Yourself and Others*

Examine "normal" age-related changes and identify ways for you to come to terms with your own aging.

Available on-demand starting
May 19th at
www.deeroakseap.com

Helpline: 866-327-2400
Web: www.deeroakseap.com
Email: eap@deeroaks.com

Deer Oaks 2020 Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series
Employee Engagement

Advanced Communication Skills that Improve Employee Motivation
February 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT
Register: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/794103984746779139

Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee Conversations
May 4th, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT
Register: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/444956266369821443

Maintaining Effective Communication Channels
August 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT
Register: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5196350630268998915

Advanced Coaching Skills for Leaders
November 2nd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT
Register: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8703449675246617347

Caregiving and the Workplace

The term *caregivers* used to represent those individuals who care for young children. Times have changed. Today, the term has evolved into a much broader definition and includes men and women taking care of an aging relative. Many of these men and women are providing some level of assistance for an aging relative while simultaneously caring for their young children. These caregivers are sandwiched between two generations within their families who require their time, energy, and finances.

Employee caregivers balance the time, financial, and emotional demands of caring for their children and relatives. These responsibilities can lead to stress, burnout, and other health issues. Employees who provide elder care are more likely to report poor or fair health, depression, and the presence of chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. In fact, there is an 8% differential in increased health care costs between caregiving and non-caregiving employees, which is costing U.S. employers an extra estimated $13.4 billion per year.[1]

Caregiving responsibilities also lead to increased absenteeism and presenteeism among working caregivers resulting from employees having to miss work to care for a relative or time lost at work making phone calls, talking to health care professionals, and dealing with other caregiving responsibilities.

Tips for Employers

- **Communicate.** Poll your employees to find out more about their needs. The combination of elder care benefits and wellness programs can provide support to working caregivers, as well as reduce employee health care costs which brings the employer bottom-line advantages.[1]

- **Educate managers and employees.** Offer "lunch and learns" or online Webinars as a preventative intervention to provide education and recommendations regarding the steps needed to avoid crises in the future. Train your managers on techniques to identify employee caregivers and how to provide appropriate support services.

- **Provide care manager services.** Offer geriatric care manager services (by phone and in person) through your EAP to individually assist employees.

References

1. Met Life Mature Market Institute. (2010, February). The Met Life study of working caregivers and employer health care costs: New insights and innovations for reducing health care costs for employers. New York, NY: Author.

Partnership for Workplace Mental Health. (n.d.). Caregiving. Retrieved August 17, 2016, from http://www.workplacementalhealth.org/

Diagnosing Your Workplace for Symptoms of Violence

Managers and employees can assess behaviors that might mean danger.

If you've been wondering about the risk of employee violence in your workplace, you can assess the risk and take steps to reduce it, whether you're a manager, supervisor or worker. Some popular methods designed to help managers detect red flags rely too heavily on demographics. In contrast, this framework is based on observable and measurable behavior.

It consists of eight categories of high-risk employee behaviors—everyday acts that aren't in themselves hostile, but indicate a need for intervention. This framework alerts managers and employees to the fact that there's a problem, and it gives them a structure to observe and document troubling behaviors. When managers know about a problem—through their own observations or employees' input—they can intervene before high-risk behaviors escalate to violence.

Three criteria are used to assess the degree of risk:

1. How many high-risk behaviors an employee exhibits
2. How often the employee exhibits the behaviors
3. How intensely the employee exhibits the behaviors

The higher an employee's behavior registers in all three categories, the greater the risk of violence.

Prevention is the goal, of course. But early intervention also improves the quality of life in your workplace. At a time when good employees are hard to find and keep, a positive and productive work environment is a big asset.

Risky Business Behaviors

Here are the eight high-risk behaviors to watch for in employees:

1. ***Actors*** behave mostly on the basis of their emotions. These employees slam doors or pound their desks rather than talk about emotions or dealing with the source of their anger. These workers might overreact to situations and people, instead of having broad perspectives or problem-solving approaches.

2. ***Fragmentors*** see no connection between actions and results. These employees see events as fragmented, like a series of isolated slides, instead of how past events led to what's happening now and what will happen. Fragmentors may fail to finish their part of projects, without accepting any responsibility for when projects fail.

3. ***Me-Firsts*** focus almost exclusively on their own needs. Me-Firsts act without regard for the needs of the team, company or customers. These employees might blame others instead of taking responsibility for problems, or take breaks when it suits them instead of waiting until appropriate times.

4. ***Wooden Sticks*** approach life inflexibly. These employees demand perfection instead of working out reasonable compromises. They try to control events rather than let things unfold. Wooden Sticks insist that things be done "my way or no way."

5. ***Mixed Messagers*** behave in passive-aggressive ways. These employees get even without acknowledging problems instead of letting others know about bothersome acts. Mixed Messagers manipulate people by hinting or referring indirectly to what they want. These employees expect failures and let them occur instead of finding ways toward success. They may talk like they're team players, but refuse to cooperate with other team members.

6. ***Escape Artists*** avoid reality. These employees relieve stress with alcohol, drugs or other activities. Escape Artists keep people at a distance instead of developing healthy work relationships. These employees might lie to others.

7. ***Shockers*** have behaviors that change suddenly and dramatically. In these cases, depressed employees suddenly appear joyful instead of recovering gradually; generally content employees suddenly appear withdrawn or depressed. Reliable and productive employees who start showing up late while their performance declines show this kind of behavior. These workers might do things that are out of character, often something that's dangerous or extreme.

8. ***Strangers*** behave in remote or withdrawn ways. These employees are obsessed with plans. They could be remote employees who become agitated and obsessive, or extremely withdrawn employees who become convinced that coworkers are out to get them.

Using the Framework
Each of the eight high-risk behaviors, and combinations of them, may be demonstrated in a variety of ways. Consider this scenario:

Alexis, a manager at a large high-tech firm, was concerned about John, who reports to her. She had learned that many of John's colleagues were afraid of him. The only things employees would say, however, were that "John makes me nervous," "John gives me the creeps," or give vague descriptions of their feelings. Alexis conceded that she had the same feelings. But she had nothing tangible to document or act upon.

When Alexis learned about the framework described above, she immediately listed examples of John's frequent high-risk behaviors and identified the categories they fit into:

•   Throws objects against a wall; yells at people; changes from good moods to bad moods unexpectedly—Actor behaviors
•   Demands that things be done his way; argues about trying new methods—Wooden Stick behaviors
•   Takes breaks whenever he wants; interrupts others when they talk; insists on being first for everything—Me-First behaviors

When her employees learned about high-risk behaviors, they gave Alexis examples that fit the same three categories—plus one more:

•   Takes messages but fails to give them to the right people; promises to take care of something but then forgets—Mixed-Messager behaviors

Using the three criteria, Alexis noted that

•   John demonstrated at least four high-risk categories.
•   He exhibited these behaviors often.
•   He was intense when he carried out these behaviors.

Alexis and John's coworkers now had a structure to describe John's behaviors. As manager, Alexis had the documentation she needed to take action.

Taking Action

If you're an employee in this type of situation, you should notify your manager about your coworker's high-risk behavior. If you're the manager, you should do what Alexis did:

- Talk to the employee about the inappropriateness of his or her behavior without saying anything about a potential risk of violence

- Require training or counseling through the company's employee assistance program (EAP), or both, depending on the details

- Use the company's disciplinary procedures appropriately

Alexis followed these steps with John. Although he resisted at first, John attended some skill-building workshops and saw a professional counselor. His behavior at work improved, and his coworkers gradually accepted him as a team member. He became a more productive and positive contributor to the organization.

Although most of these efforts bring positive results, managers must be prepared to fire employees if high-risk behaviors continue or escalate. Coworkers' alertness—combined with these observable and measurable behavior categories—can alert managers and support their efforts.

Source: McClure, L. (Reviewed 2018). Diagnosing your workplace for symptoms of violence. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

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 know giving employees feedback is important, but how do I know if I am giving them enough?

A. The best way to find out is to ask: "Do I give you enough feedback on your work—including both positive and negative aspects of what you do?" You will be surprised at how many employees say you are giving enough feedback when you believe it isn't that much. Others will say you aren't offering enough, even though you think you are giving plenty. The good news is that you will discover what employees need and will be able to allocate your time where it is wanted and needed most.

Q. I have seen alcoholic employees enter treatment quickly when their job performance problems were confronted, and others who avoided treatment for years while manipulating others until they were eventually fired. What explains this gap in motivation?

A. Who recovers and achieves sobriety and who does not has been a focal point for discussing the insidious nature of alcoholism and addiction for decades. Even Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has observed in its writings that some alcoholics seem constitutionally incapable of getting sober, although it also has observed that rarely does someone fail who truly follows its program. All of this alludes to the role of an individual's personality as a key component in avoiding treatment, but more important is the employee's past experience with being enabled. The more extensive this enabling history, the more difficult it can be to intervene. AA members use the witticism "too smart to get sober" to describe alcoholics who are intellectualizing, manipulative, and well-practiced at avoiding treatment.

Q. I read recently that 60% of workers are too intimidated to bring a problem to their boss. I don't think my employees are in this group, but maybe I am fooling myself or in denial. How can managers help employees be more willing to bring their problems forward?

A. As a manager, you must continually "market" your approachability by what you say and do. Even if you believe you are a nice person with a soft disposition, you will need to help employees remember that. You do this by regularly engaging with them and inviting them to bring their problems forward. Managers, supervisors, and other authority figures possess degrees of control or at least hold influence over a worker's employment status. This is enough to prevent employees from feeling completely comfortable in bringing a problem to the boss, or in rocking the boat; they're likely to be unsure of how the boss will react. This is a natural dynamic associated with fear, but it is easy to overcome. Your awareness of this dynamic is half the battle. Your EAP is the perfect consultant to help examine your relationship with your work group, troubleshoot communication problems, and offer guidance on individual employee problems.

Source: hbr.org search ["managers more intimidating"]