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EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



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DEER OAKS EAP PRESENTS:
Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

*The 7 Habits of Highly
Effective Supervisors*

Date: February 28, 2022

Time: 1:00-2:00 PM CT

REGISTER

Assertiveness Skills

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is the ability to state positively and constructively your rights or needs without violating the rights of others. When you use direct, open, and honest communication in relationships to meet your personal needs, you feel more confident, gain respect from others, and live a happier, fulfilled life.

Benefits of Assertiveness

Acting assertive helps maintain honesty in relationships, allows you to feel more in control of your world, and improves your ability to make decisions.

Roadblocks to Assertiveness

Fear that you will harm others, or that you will experience rejection and feel shame, may prevent you from acting assertive. This is based upon a belief that other people's needs, opinions, and judgments are more important than your own. Believing assertiveness hurts another person can keep you from meeting your legitimate physical and emotional needs. As a result, you feel hurt, anxious, and angry about life.

Lessons learned from parents or caregivers contribute to your beliefs about the legitimacy of your personal rights. This can cause you to act passively to conform to these beliefs. A few examples include the right to decide how to lead your life, the right to pursue goals and dreams, the right to a valid opinion, the right to say how you want to be treated, the right to say "no," the right to change your mind, the right to privacy, the right to ask for help, and many more. Acting to assert any of these rights leads many people to think they are acting selfish.

Is assertiveness selfish?

Selfish means being concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself. This is not assertiveness. Being assertive does not dismiss or ignore the needs of others. Assertiveness focuses legitimate or important needs.

Is assertiveness aggressive?

Assertiveness is not aggression. Aggressive means that you express your rights at the expense of another or forcibly deny the rights of others. If you struggle with being assertive, you may have mislabeled assertive behavior by others as aggressive. This may help you feel justified about not being assertive. However, believing assertiveness is aggressive can prevent you from taking steps to improve

your assertiveness skills.

Practice makes better.

Recognizing what causes your lack of assertiveness is helpful, but committing to change is more important. Practicing assertiveness skills helps you confront old ways of thinking, helps you become more naturally assertive, and is self-reinforcing. Keeping track of your progress is helpful. Be patient. In the beginning, you won't be assertive at every opportunity, and you might be assertive in some situations where it isn't necessary. It's all part of the process of growing to be more assertive. Notice the general trend of your success, and give yourself a pat on the back as things change.

Simple Assertiveness Formula

Each time an opportunity occurs to be assertive, make notes in a small notebook. Consider keeping it in your pocket or purse. Record: (1) the specific event that called for an assertiveness response; (2) what personal right was involved (i.e., the right to say "no"); (3) how you responded; what you said; (4) what you did well in this situation; and (5) reminders to yourself about what you will do next time to be assertive if this situation is repeated.

A Few Assertiveness Tips

Assertiveness frequently means using "I statements" combined with a word that describes what you want. For example, "I want," "I need," "I would prefer," "I do not like," "I am upset about," and so on. Be careful not to minimize such statements by couching them with questions that subordinate your needs. Example: "I need you to assist with this short turnaround project—do you mind?"

What the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Can Do

Being assertive isn't easy for everybody. You may have a personal history or childhood experiences that serve as strong roadblocks to the changes you want to make. The EAP can find resources, especially professional counseling assistance, to help you make faster progress in being assertive.

Source: U.S. Army, Fort Derrick. (2007). Assertiveness skills. Retrieved October 2, 2018, from <http://www.detrack.army.mil/>

Autism and the Workplace

As an increasing number of organizations commit themselves to workforce diversity and inclusion initiatives, growing attention has been given to supporting individuals on the autism spectrum.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a broad range of neurological developmental disabilities that can negatively impact communication skills, social behaviors, and sensory sensitivities. Autism is understood as a “spectrum” disorder because the symptoms and abilities of individuals with autism vary widely from person to person, ranging from mild to severe and debilitating.

While every individual’s experience with autism is different, challenges most often identified with ASD include varying degrees of

- Sensitivity to sounds, textures, and pain
- Intense interest in a narrow range of topics
- Rigid attachment to routines, patterns, or behaviors
- Difficulty communicating and interacting with others

As ASD is becoming better understood, many are recognizing that the neurological differences associated with ASD can also translate into valuable workplace skills. For example, a strong awareness of patterns means that many individuals on the spectrum excel in math, sequencing, coding, and other data-driven processes. In fact, 16 percent of students with autism who pursue postsecondary education choose computer science fields.¹

Other strengths commonly associated with ASD include:

- High levels of concentration and attention to detail
- Capacity for inferential reasoning
- Strong ability to identify errors
- Creative problem solving
- Unique perspective and “outside-the-box” thinking
- Ability to build, analyze, and understand complex systems
- Persistence
- Exceptional memory
- Innovation
- Loyalty
- Trustworthiness
- Productivity
- Reliability

Even though an estimated 60 percent of individuals with autism have average or above-average intelligence, the unemployment rate for people on the spectrum is high, even for those who graduated from college. It is thought

that traditional methods of recruitment and hiring, including the emphasis on social engagement, put individuals with ASD at a disadvantage.

In recent years, several major corporations, including Microsoft, SAP, and JP Chase Morgan, have developed neurodiversity inclusion programs to recruit and support employees who are on the autism spectrum. For these organizations, the investment has aligned with their organization’s culture and social responsibility efforts and met their talent needs.¹

At JP Chase Morgan, individuals with ASD have been recruited to serve in a number of competitive roles, including fraud analysts, compliance analysts, and data scientists. JP Chase Morgan’s return-on-investment (ROI) data revealed that the individuals in their pilot program were 48 percent more productive after six months than their neurotypical counterparts. The second class of participants were 90 to 140 percent more productive, with zero errors after six months.¹

Organizational leaders say that individuals on the spectrum are not only helping address talent shortages in areas that are typically difficult to fill, but they are also providing a more diverse workplace experience for all employees. There were unexpected benefits as well. Once organizations created more inclusive environments, they found that existing employees began to self-disclose their own autism diagnoses, which they had previously kept hidden. Communication across the organizations improved as well, and managers involved in the program became better leaders overall.¹

Reference

Annabi, H., Crooks, E.W., Barnett, N., Guadagno, J., Mahoney, J.R., Michelle, J., et al. (2019). *Autism @ work playbook: Finding talent and creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with autism*. Seattle, WA: ACCESS-IT, The Information School, University of Washington. Retrieved October 15, 2021, from <https://www.autismspeaks.org>

Source: *Workplace Options (WPO)*. (2021, April). *Autism and the workplace*. Raleigh, NC: Author. Retrieved October 15, 2021, from the WPO Blog at <https://www.workplaceoptions.com>

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 is the best way to develop loyalty among staff? I have respect from employees, and I respect them. I feel that, but loyalty is something more. How is it defined, and how do I get it?

A. A good way to look at loyalty versus respect is to see that loyalty is a layer of dedication to your leadership that has been built on respect over time. Your employees may respect your position, authority, skills, and abilities, but whether they go the extra mile is a question associated with loyalty. Loyalty is earned by respecting your employees over time and is nurtured by understanding the needs of each of your employees and what they need to be happy, healthy, and productive. Loyalty is the dividend of investing yourself in the relationship you have with each of your employees. Loyalty is currency to get things done. When your employees respect you as a leader, they may deliver 100%. When they are loyal, they'll reach even further.

Q. Is bickering a problem I should refer to the EAP? I have a few employees in our small office, and they seem to get on each other's nerves quite a bit. They don't complain about it, and they are great performers. Personally, however, I don't like the tension.

A. Strain among employees in close quarters is probably not something you are going to be able to entirely eliminate. It is the nature of relationships, even good ones, to experience conflict, especially in tight quarters. As you observe, performance appears unaffected. However, not all small conflicts are the same. You may want to delve deeper just to ensure something small won't later turn into something serious or risky to the workplace. For example, is the bickering or tension caused by inequity or unfairness? Are work roles not balanced well? Does one of your employees believe they have a better future than another? Inquire about these or similar issues periodically so you understand what may be underlying the conflicts beyond the apparent issues they involve.

Q. Is it appropriate for a supervisor to raise mental health issues with employees, such as pointing out that an employee "looks stressed out"? This might prompt employees to consider using the EAP.

A. Although it is not uncommon for a manager to use phrases such as "you look a little stressed out," those might be misinterpreted by your employee. So, why not consider a different question with a business purpose, such as "you appear rushed and are fumbling with your work. Is there something I can do to help? Is everything all right?" This can lead the employee to mention something personal, in which case you can respond by recommending the EAP as a resource. Mental health in the workplace has received much attention in business news recently. This does not mean that supervisors should probe mental health issues or become diagnosticians. Continue to focus on performance issues that don't resolve. You will ultimately refer employees with personal problems earlier and more often.

Q. My employee's husband showed at work and engaged in a shouting match with her in the lobby. It lasted about 30 seconds, but it shook everyone up. I made a formal referral to the EAP based upon this disruption. Did I do the right thing? This was not a performance issue, but it must not happen again.

A. Yes, you did the right thing, and based your referral on the disruption everyone witnessed. This is a domestic violence incident spilling into the workplace. Your employee could be a domestic violence victim, or conceivably, the perpetrator of domestic violence. We don't really know. However, the EAP will assess the situation and make a determination regarding how to proceed. This will include an assessment of the risk to the employee and the organization, and if need be, communication with a signed release so you can feel assured that any issues regarding this situation are being properly handled. Remember, a formal referral to the EAP is not a punitive measure, and helping her participate in the program by making a formal referral was a smart move. Domestic violence cases can spill into the workplace, and many historical accounts have included injury and death of fellow workers.

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