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Public Employee Benefits Alliance

# 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**

# Be a Great Mentor

If you've mastered skills in your career, gained maturity in your dealings with coworkers or as a manager, and experienced the joys of professional accomplishment, chances are you've had some help along the way from generous friends and associates. If you're lucky, you've been given a boost at some point by a mentor.

Now that you're in a position to help others by sharing your knowledge and insights, why not be a mentor yourself? Mentorship is a way of paying it forward: acknowledging those who've helped you in the past—not by repaying them, but by extending that same sort of generous support and guidance to others.

## What is a mentor?

A mentor is a trusted advisor, often someone with expertise in a professional field who helps a less experienced colleague navigate work, learn new skills, and take on greater responsibility. A mentor can also provide support and guidance outside of work—to a child or teenager, for example, a younger friend, or a new immigrant.

## Why be a mentor?

The benefits of mentorship to the mentee are obvious. Having a knowledgeable ally can help in focusing efforts on learning and skill development, choosing among new challenges to gain valuable experience, gaining maturity in dealing with other people, and making important life decisions.

The benefits to the mentor are real, too. Mentorship is a way to leave a legacy. As a mentor, you share hard-won lessons so they can be passed on. That's good for your organization, your professional field, and your community. On an emotional level, it feels good to help another person succeed. That's probably the biggest benefit of all.

## How to Be a Great Mentor

- **Treat your mentee with respect.** Each mentorship is a different relationship, built around the unique personality, strengths, and goals of your mentee and the experience and expertise you have to offer. If it's a good match, you have something to share that your mentee will find valuable. However, don't assume it's what you want to share or that the path the mentee chooses will be the path you would choose for them. Spend time up front talking about the mentee's

hopes and aspirations, ways you might help, and how you'd like to work together. Once you agree on time commitments for the relationship, honor them, no matter how busy you are. Be fully present whenever you meet with your mentee—no checking emails or messages and no interruptions.

- **Listen and ask questions.** As the mentor, you may be the expert, but you're not the boss in this relationship. You're in a supporting role, and you need to let your mentee take the lead. Ask questions to get to know your mentee as a person and to understand the challenges and obstacles they are facing and the areas in which they would like to grow. Then listen, without interrupting. Use active listening skills, repeating back what you have heard to confirm that you've understood. Take notes so that you remember the key points your mentee is sharing. Only when you've heard and understood should you begin to offer guidance.
- **Take a genuine interest in your mentee as a person.** A good mentor is a confidant and guide in life, not just in work. Build a caring and trusting relationship with your mentee, one in which it feels safe to talk about emotions, fears, and setbacks, not just accomplishments and successes. Show that you care when your mentee is struggling and that you're happy for and proud of them when things are going well.
- **Give honest feedback in a caring way.** If you think your mentee has taken a misstep or has a gap in their skill set, let them know. People can't learn from their mistakes or shore up their weaknesses if they aren't aware of them. One way to do this kindly is to share a story from your own experience, where you took a similar misstep and felt the consequences or when you became aware of a self-improvement need and found ways to address it. Balance constructive criticism with encouraging praise for your mentee's strengths and positive actions.
- **Guide; don't steer.** Don't solve every problem for your mentee. Instead, help guide them to their own solutions by asking questions and drawing out their thoughts. If you over-help, you can actually get in the way of your mentee's learning and growth. Let your mentee make the decisions, too, especially about

important life and career choices. What seems right to you might not suit the personality and ambitions of your mentee. A good mentor helps a mentee find and follow their own path—even if that path takes them to another organization or into a different field.

- **Lead by example.** Be a positive role model for your mentee. Show how to handle conflict in productive ways, how to overcome obstacles and handle setbacks, how to communicate to understand and be understood, and how to maintain high ethical standards in everything you do. Know that your mentee is learning more from what you do and how you act than from what you say. Pass your wisdom on through your behavior.

## Mentor Talks: How to Lead in a Post-Pandemic World

The U.S. Embassy Brasilia hosted a live virtual discussion in May 2020 for exchange alumni and members of the Young Leaders of America Initiative (YLA) Network on “How to Lead in a Post-Pandemic World,” featuring entrepreneurship experts Alisa Cohn and Richie Norton, with moderator Rhett Power. Recognizing that the future is uncertain but will not be the same as the past, Alisa, Richie and Rhett share insights from their experience as entrepreneurs for how up-and-coming young leaders and entrepreneurs can adapt to their current circumstances and prepare for what may come. Below are their suggestions.

### “Orient yourself toward action.”—Alisa Cohn

Focusing on building a strong foundation for the future can help ensure that as a young leader or entrepreneur, you are preparing yourself to adapt to the unexpected while continuing to make progress toward your goals. Even for established entrepreneurs, this is an opportunity to learn and experiment. Taking on a “Day 1” mindset and looking at what you have built and what you still want to accomplish from the perspective of starting at the beginning can help you see potential where you may have seen only challenges.

As Alisa notes, “We are in this moment where we have to embrace reality and then figure out what’s possible. That’s entrepreneurship, all the good and all the bad of it.” With an eye toward the future, each of the speakers shared their suggestions for finding motivation and inspiration:

- As a Man Thinketh by John Allen
- Man’s Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl
- Books by Marianne Williamson

Being a great mentor takes practice and patience, but the rewards can be huge. You’ll have the satisfaction of helping another person succeed in life, and you may become a better person in the process.

*Source: Morgan, H. (2021, June 1). Be a great mentor (C. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*

- First Round Review from First Round Capital
- Real-time podcasts on your specific sector/industry
- Connections through peer networks like the YLA Network

Thinking about what he would suggest that other entrepreneurs read for inspiration and motivation during this time, Richie, an entrepreneur and author himself, reflects that “the way you think about the world is the way you approach the world. No matter what tactical thing you learn, you will approach it based on your mindset.” Your reading and listening choices can help you change your perspective and develop a new worldview.

There are opportunities out there, but those opportunities may not look the same as you thought they might. Recognizing that current circumstances are different than before is the beginning of creating change. Richie’s advice for young leaders and entrepreneurs: Don’t wait for things to go back to the way they were. Focus on moving forward into the future. Don’t wait for change. Create it. “Look for the one thing you can do today and do it.” Turn your goals into decisions.

### “Take care of yourself, so you can take care of others.”—Rhett Power

Alisa, Richie and Rhett also made a point that entrepreneurs and young leaders, as managers and as leaders, should practice empathy, starting with themselves. Richie encouraged those participating in the discussion to recognize that the dark times “are a tunnel, not a cave; you’re going to come through it, but if you stop walking you

will self-impose a cave on you. Keep walking.” Focusing on the little things you can accomplish and breaking down the bigger challenges into the little opportunities you have to make progress toward what is necessary will help you get where you need to go.

For leaders and managers of teams, Rhett suggests involving members of your team in the problem-solving process. Recognizing that you are not alone in solving challenges, you might be surprised with the creativity of your team. After all, they are invested in the success of your shared mission too. Alisa advises young leaders to “double down on purpose” and empower your team to be a part of moving the team forward.

**START (Serve, Thank, Ask, Receive, Trust)—Richie Norton**

Each of the speakers also offered examples of businesses that have found ways to adapt to new circumstances: a bakery that created a way for customers to order online for countrywide delivery, a dog-grooming business that has diversified into pet apparel, and an event-organizing business that has refocused on sending joy-in-a-box. As Alisa notes, “How you show up affects everything.”

Using this moment to reconnect with your customers, with the people you serve, can help you decide how to pivot. Alisa notes, “Problems and obstacles [are] everywhere. But what CAN you do? ... That is where to focus your time and attention.”

For young leaders and entrepreneurs facing difficult circumstances, all three experts encouraged a focus on building relationships. For entrepreneurs, this means getting in front of customers, testing your market, and connecting with potential partners and investors. For young leaders, this may mean connecting with family, neighbors and your community to serve them the best you can, however you are able.

Richie shares his mnemonic for developing new relationships: START.

- **Serve**—Serve others, and offer what you can.
- **Thank**—Thank the people you connect with in your network or from your business for the opportunity to engage with them.
- **Ask**—Ask for help, and if you are able to ask for what people are already willing to give, even better.
- **Receive**—Openly receive what other people send your way, both the gifts and the criticisms, as opportunities to build on what you have done.
- **Trust**—Trust yourself and the decisions you are making. Other people will have opinions, but the one that matters most is your own.

Building relationships, building your network, will solidify your foundation for future decisions.

*Source: U.S. Embassy Brasilia (Cohn, A. [Presenter], Norton, R. [Presenter], & Power, R. [Moderator]). (2020, May). Mentor talks: How to lead in a post-pandemic world. Live virtual discussion to the members of the Young Leaders of America Initiative (YLA) Network. Retrieved July 7, 2020, from <https://ylai.state.gov>*

# 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. How do I document an attitude problem so there is no uncertainty later about what I mean? What really bothers me most is the cynicism, eye rolling, and sighing.*

A. Behaviors such as rolling one's eyes, sighing, and huffing may be triggering but are difficult to document. The key is discovering what is articulable and quantifiable and has an adverse impact. Do words like arrogant, aggressive, cynical, critical, indifferent, or rude describe your employee's attitude? If arrogance is descriptive, documentation might be: "John often demonstrates an exaggerated sense of his importance or abilities. For example, on (date, time) he remarked that 'everyone in the office is too lazy to learn the combination to the file cabinet,' so they 'rely on him' to open it in the morning. Such a statement has a negative effect on office morale and creates conflict." (Note how this example does not label the employee as "arrogant." You are using the definition of it followed by an example. This is more effective.) Formulate attitude documentation with 1) behavior associated with the attitude, 2) a description of what was said or what happened, and 3) its adverse impact. (Hint: The EAP can offer general guidance on documentation, and a dictionary may provide descriptive words you're searching for.)

*Q. What reason do supervisors give for why they did not refer a troubled employee to the EAP following a tragic incident in the workplace where there were signs and symptoms clearly present?*

A. Numerous tragedies that occur in the workplace have been associated with troubled employees, including accidental death, workplace violence, and property damage, among others. These incidents may have been prevented if the worker was referred to the EAP earlier. There are two dominant reasons for not having referred such employees early on. One is the supervisor's belief that no serious problem existed because evidence of behavior

or performance problems was intermittent. If periods of normalcy and satisfactory performance existed, it may have appeared that the employee's problems were personally manageable, and the unease associated with a formal EAP referral wasn't necessary. The other reason is that the employee's awareness of their problem and what to do about it appeared convincing enough to the supervisor to dismiss the idea of a formal referral. If a supervisor periodically wonders if a referral to the EAP is necessary for an employee, contacting the EAP for a consult is the prudent action.

*Q. I am a new supervisor. What supervisory skills can the EAP best help me develop if I get into situations or experience problems I can't manage properly?*

A. There are many skills a supervisor needs in order to be effective. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the specific skill that is lacking in order to address a particular problem. This is where the EAP might help. For example, if morale in your work unit is an issue, and you don't see it improving, is it because you lack effective communication skills? Are interpersonal skills the problem? Could you improve your conflict resolution skills? Then again, is it possible the morale problem is mostly out of your control? Use the EAP to help you troubleshoot issues you experience on the job, particularly interpersonal, intrapersonal, and soft-skill-related issues. The EAP may help you with personal issues, refer you to effective skill development resources, or even send you back to your supervisor or the organization for coaching or mentorship, but with clarification of your needs.

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