



EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

March 2023



DEER OAKS PRESENTS

Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

Advanced Communication Skills that Improve Employee Motivation

This practical session covers several advanced interpersonal skills that can help managers to strengthen relationships with employees to improve their motivation.

When: April 10th at 1:00PM CST

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Table of Contents

Communicating Performance Problems: Q&A • P. 2

Consulting Employees About Performance Problems • P. 3

Ask Your EAP! • P. 5

COMMUNICATING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS: Q&A

Do I have the authority to tell an employee that his or her performance is unacceptable?

Yes. More than that, as the employee's supervisor, it is your responsibility to keep an employee informed about your assessment of his or her performance, particularly when you have concerns. Within your organization, there may be a policy or practice you must follow when you notify an employee that his or her performance has become unacceptable. You should contact your human resources (HR) office for further information.

Do I have to wait for the annual performance appraisal to tell an employee that his or her performance is unacceptable?

No, you should not wait. In fact, good managers provide their employees with performance feedback throughout the appraisal cycle. Employees should be notified of unacceptable performance at any time that an employee's performance is determined to be unacceptable.

Check with your organization on your internal policy before you inform an employee of unacceptable performance. Remember, regardless of whatever organization requirements apply, no employee likes to feel "sandbagged" at appraisal time, so address the poor performance as soon as you become aware of it.

Should my employee get a copy of all my notes about his or her performance?

As a general rule, you should give your employee a copy of the notes from a discussion or meeting that pertains to your expectations and responsibilities as well as the employee's responsibilities. It is expected that you may take "supervisory" notes to serve as "memory joggers" regarding the employee's performance. For example, these notes can include dates or the number of times an employee was given an instruction. This type of supervisory information does not have to be included in the notes given to the employee. Contact your organization's legal counsel or HR staff for information on Privacy Act requirements concerning supervisory notes.



I've never had to counsel an employee before. What kind of information is worth putting into supervisory notes?

One of the most important things to remember in taking notes is to date them so they reflect when you met with an employee or when you noted a particularly good or unacceptable instance of performance. Keep track of specific examples of poor performance on work assignments. Doing so will make it easier for you to explain deficiencies in the employee's performance through the use of examples. Note how you expressed your performance expectations and how the employee responded to the counseling. Once an *opportunity period* has begun, you will need to make notes of all routine meetings with the employee. In addition, you may need to keep a record of when assignments were given to the employee and what instructions were provided.

This person is the first employee with unacceptable performance I've ever had in my team. When I looked at the performance standards, I found out that he isn't even doing the work described in them. What now?

Your first step always should be to convey a clear message to the employee about your expectations regarding performance. Performance standards that do not relate to the job need to be rewritten so there will be no confusion between your oral instructions or written guidance and the performance standards themselves. If the new standards that you have written are substantially different from the old ones, you will need to give the employee a chance to work under the new standards before you determine whether or not the employee's performance is unacceptable. You do not always need to rely on formal performance standards, depending on the legal authority under which you act. However, you run a serious risk of either having your action overturned or mitigated upon appeal if the employee can demonstrate that his or her performance expectations were not clear.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Employee Services, Partnership & Labor Relations. (2017, March). Q&A step one questions and answers (B. Schuette, Ed.). In Addressing and resolving poor performance (Pub. No. ES/SWP-02803-03-17, pp. 8-9). Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://www.opm.gov>

CONSULTING EMPLOYEES ABOUT PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

Guidance is presented below on preparing for and conducting consulting sessions.

Preparing for a Consulting Session

1. Once you recognize that a performance problem exists, review what guidance the employee has been given on performance. Often, that guidance exists only in performance standards that were issued early on. You may also have some applicable operating manuals or guides, so take a look at everything.



2. Read the performance standards. If they don't really describe what you want from the employee, take the time to fix them. If your organization uses generic standards that cannot be modified, think through the types of things that you will say to the employee to further explain what it is you expect. Write these notes down.
3. Even though you may never need to go any further than an oral consulting session to get the employee to improve, take the time to contact the human resources (HR) office, and find out what your technical adviser would say if you do need to take formal action later. Ask that specialist to review the performance standards to ensure that there aren't any problems with them.
4. If you do have operating manuals, guides, or other tools that all employees use, take a look at them, and see how these could be used to help the employee improve. Try to read them as objectively as possible to look for areas that may not be clear. Remember, you know this job (probably better than

almost everybody else), but there is some part of the job that is not making sense or becoming clear to this employee. If you have to, break it down into parts, and explain it from the bottom up.

5. Remember, your goal is to improve the employee's performance, not to win an argument with the employee. To prepare for a consulting session with an employee, write out then practice saying what acceptable performance in the job looks like. Listen to yourself. If it doesn't make any sense to you, it won't make any sense to the employee. Be as specific as possible.
6. Have some specific examples of poor performance in your mind (or your notes) so that you can respond to the inevitable, "What do you mean?" Do not emphasize past poor performance, though; instead, seek to clarify and encourage future good performance.

Conducting the Consulting Session

1. In scheduling a meeting to discuss a performance issue, make sure you allow adequate time for your comments and any feedback from the employee. Conduct the meeting in a private place where the conversation will not be overheard by coworkers.
2. Choose your time based on your knowledge of the employee. Is this someone who needs to have a meeting like this on Friday, so he or she can sort things out over the weekend? Or, is this a person who will feel like you are dumping on him or her, leaving no opportunity to respond for two days? Use the same thought process for deciding how information is best given. Although you will be meeting to have a discussion, would this employee like to read through some written notes before talking? Would a verbal discussion with a commitment to follow up with something in writing be more of the style for the employee?
3. Set and maintain a constructive tone: Be calm, professional, and focused.
4. Seek cooperation, not confrontation by focusing on how the employee's performance fits into the performance of the total organization.
5. Choose several points throughout your comments where you can stop and get confirmation from the employee that he or she understands the problems and your expectations. Providing opportunities for him or her to respond will allow the employee to be active in the discussion and may lessen the negative connotation of a "lecture" being given.

6. At the conclusion of the meeting, end on a positive note by emphasizing that improving the employee's performance is a mutually beneficial goal. Offer a written summary then or to be given to the employee later. Having a written summary is particularly valuable if you will be trying something new or changing any work assignment routine.
7. Keep notes for yourself documenting the date of the discussion and any specific agreements you reached with the employee regarding changes to the way work is assigned or structured.
8. Follow up! If the employee shows improvement, let him or her know immediately! If the employee appears to be still struggling, go back and talk again.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Employee Services, Partnership & Labor Relations. (2017, March). Counseling employees about performance problems (B. Schuette, Ed.). In Addressing and resolving poor performance (Pub. No. ES/SWP-02803-03-17, pp. 10-11). Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://www.opm.gov>

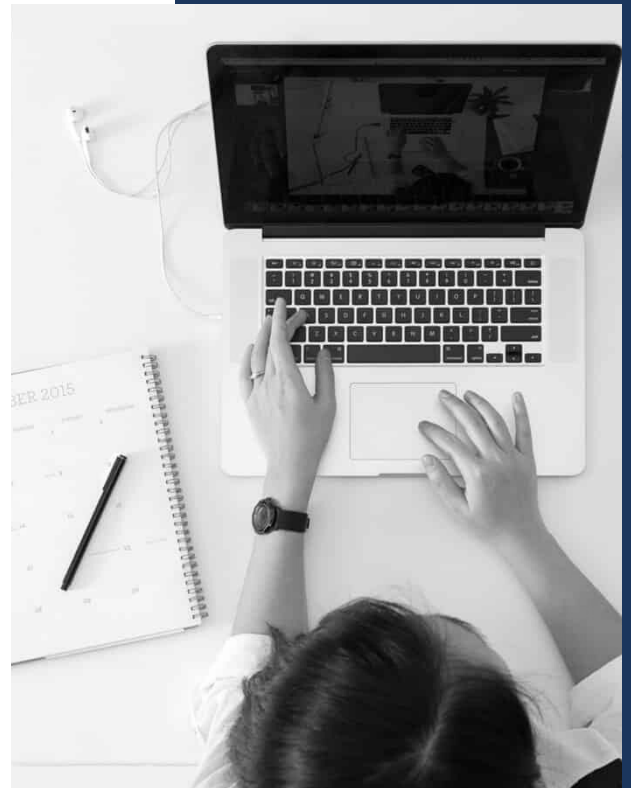
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. My employee mentioned in a casual conversation that she is being treated for depression by a psychiatrist. She added, “but don’t worry about me, and don’t think you need to alter my work schedule.” We are entering our tense busy season. Should I make some adjustments and lighten her load anyway?

A. Although your employee mentions her medical condition, there is no need to alter her workload because no accommodations have been requested. If such requests were made it would be advisable to discuss them with your human resources advisor so any appropriate administrative procedures could be followed in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The organization may want to understand fully any request she makes, assess its impact productivity and the work situation, how long it would continue, or other concerns. Anytime an employee mentions a personal problem, even in passing, it is an opportunity to mention the EAP as a confidential, helpful resource. Do so even if an employee mentions treatment or being under the care of a medical doctor. Regarding depression, most doctors manage depression with medications to alleviate symptoms. Clinical interviews are primarily to assess alleviation of symptoms. Prompting the employee to remember the EAP may lead to a referral to address other concerns.

Q. I have referred many employees to the EAP over the years. I often notice the personal problem gets resolved, but performance also improves. This is expected, but it is often beyond what even I anticipated. What explains this surprising level of performance improvement after employees visit the EAP?

A. When employees participate in the EAP, they are not only assisted in resolving a personal problem, but may also need to participate in ongoing activities or personal efforts to maintain and improve mental and physical wellness. Preventing relapse of a substance use disorder especially requires a lot of selfcare for the patient/employee. This may include focusing on improving one’s diet, attention to health needs, better stress management, chronic disease education, better problemsolving, psychotherapy, goal setting, work-life balance, and attending to relationship problems at home, the continuation of which would jeopardize recovery. It is sometimes said that employees who visit the EAP for help with a personal problem get “better than well.” This is the phenomenon you are witnessing.



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