

Keeping In Touch

For Supervisors

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The Village EAP's quarterly newsletter dedicated to helping supervisors lead, teach and guide employees

Ole P. Rygg...

Incorporating Supervisor Referrals into Performance Management

As a supervisor or manager, you are destined to be faced with the issue of performance problems at one time or another. Employees do not always perform as well as you expect them to — there may be conflicts between co-workers, employees may come to work late or leave early, they may have personal problems that affect work performance, or there may be signs of substance abuse.

If you see signs of deteriorating performance, and would like input or an outside perspective on the situation, our **Supervisor HelpLine** (800-627-8220 or 701-451-4900 — ask for the EAP Supervisor HelpLine) is a valuable resource. Every day we get calls from supervisors looking for advice on how to address various performance or employee issues. Most cases are related to communications problems, conflicts with co-workers or supervisor, excessive absenteeism, unacceptable quantity or quality of work, or drug-free workplace or D.O.T. violations.

When intervening, you should always know the facts in the case before deciding your course of action, and prepare for the meeting with the employee by comparing actual performance to your expectations and the employee's written job description. Defining the specific discrepancies between what is stated in the job performance and actual behavior and performance creates an objective norm or standard, which may simplify the issues and create a rationale for addressing them.

Based on the severity and extent of the performance issue at hand, we may recommend a Supervisor Referral to the Village EAP; an effective tool and resource for supervisors. You can make two types of referrals, informal supervisor referrals and formal supervisor referrals.

When employees volunteer information about personal stress or problems, yet there is no deterioration in job performance, an **Informal Supervisor Referral** may be appropriate. Since there are no adverse effects on work performance, the situation calls for minimal supervisor intervention, if any. What you can do, however, is to remind the employee about the benefits available through the Village EAP, and also provide information on how to access these benefits (call 800-627-8220 or 701-451-4900). An informal referral allows you to offer assistance and resources, while maintaining a professional relationship with the employee, and avoiding involvement in the employee's personal life.

If performance is deteriorating, or if there is a drug-free workplace violation, a **Formal Supervisor Referral** to the Village EAP is appropriate. A formal referral



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Supervisor Referrals *continued on page two*

Supervisor Referrals

continued from page one

is a good way to connect employees with professionals trained and experienced in diagnosing and treating personal, professional, or substance abuse problems or issues. Employees are given a chance to face the problem, take ownership of the situation, and learn tools and techniques to help deal with and overcome the specific challenge.

By making a formal referral to The Village EAP, a supervisor can take advantage of external expertise in dealing with the performance problems. The supervisor is kept informed about the employee's attendance, compliance with recommendations, possible referrals to supplemental resources or treatment programs, or other significant changes or developments. This allows for the coordination of external and internal resources in addressing performance or drug-free workplace issues, and for finding new avenues to improving employee performance, attitude, and behavior.

The Supervisor HelpLine, Informal and Formal Supervisor Referral services are included in most Village EAP contracts. If you have any questions, would like additional information, or would like to take advantage of these services, contact Ole Rygg at 800-627-8220 ext. 5030, or (701) 451-5030 in the Fargo/Moorhead area.

Employees in Crisis

Life doesn't treat everyone equally. Sometimes life is an ordeal. If you employ 10 people, it's likely that at least one of them is "broken down" by one thing or another — alcohol or drug dependency; depression or excessive stress; or family, legal or financial worries, for example — probably struggling all the while to remain productive and cheerful at work.

When you know or suspect something is wrong, it's tempting to do nothing, hoping the situation will resolve itself. However, addressing the issue will not only help your employees and their families, but also strengthen morale, boost productivity, reduce accidents and absenteeism, and allow you a good night's sleep. You can help more than you might realize, without being "permissive" or getting mired in someone else's swamp.

What's the Problem?

Family tensions, illness, addiction, battering, financial woes, grief, and divorce are common culprits when employees become overwhelmed and it starts to show. Depression might be looming as well, or depression can strike on its own, without an apparent reason.

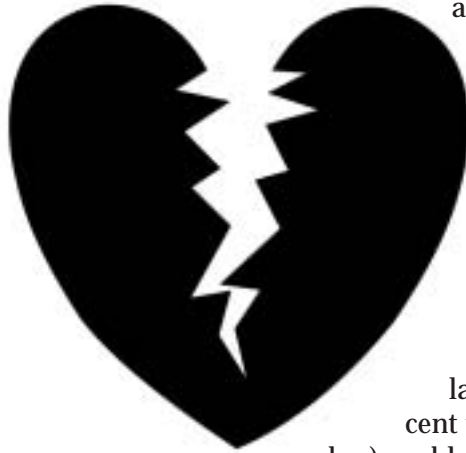
If Maxine keeps nodding off at her desk, the cause could be depression, substance abuse, or the after-hours job she took on because of the family's indebtedness. If Sherwood becomes uncharacteristically zippy, talks a lot, and makes preposterous decisions, he could be in the manic phase of bipolar disorder ("manic depression").

If Shirley suffers a spate of injuries and claims she "walked into a door," "slipped in the shower," "tripped on a roller skate," and "fell off the roof," she could have an undiagnosed neuromuscular disease or a spouse, boyfriend, or adolescent who thinks Shirley is the cause of all his (or her) problems.

Any employee whose behavior is peculiar or who "just hasn't been himself" for more than a few weeks could be on a downward spiral. Get to know your employees well enough so you'll notice unusual behavior. Don't depend on other employees to tell you. They might fear betraying a confidence or even (if they don't trust you) exposing their co-worker to disciplinary action.

It's Your Problem

The earlier you learn about an employee's crisis and take constructive action, the better for all concerned. Without intervention, however, the situation usually worsens, taking its toll in absenteeism and sick leave, workplace accidents and injuries, health-insurance and disability claims, workers' compensation, workplace violence, and turnover. Remember, the troubled employee isn't the only one whose job performance suffers. The drop in morale, job satisfaction, and productivity is usually company-wide.



Negative Employees Turned Positive

The negative employee is like a duck. A duck? Author and executive consultant, Tom Bay, explains: "Ducks are very self-centered. They start quacking when they're looking for food, and that attracts more ducks. Pretty soon you have a whole bunch of ducks quacking. ... In any company, once a duck starts quacking, he or she will attract more ducks, and they're not producing, they're quacking. If you want to soar with the eagles, you can't hang out with ducks." Since the first caveman groused to the second about rolling a boulder up a hill, the negative employee has been a fixture in the workplace.

What's changing is the attention employers are paying to turning all of those frowns upside down. Companies are learning that the root causes of poor attitudes often are surprisingly simple and inexpensive to fix. Often the solutions are as basic as better communication and creating an environment of trust.

"Most people leave their jobs because they're not appreciated," said Carleen Haas, human resources consultant at Humana Inc.'s corporate headquarters in Louisville, Ky.

"The bottom-line is getting the supervisors connected to their employees. They really need to know one-on-one what the employee is doing and what the employee's issues and concerns are. The longer people sit without feeling like they are being heard, the longer it festers."

Cast of Characters

Consultant Gary Topchik, author of the just-released book "Managing Workplace Negativity," identifies a cast of 14 negative co-workers that just about everyone has portrayed at one time or another. They include the "rumormongers," "scapegoaters," "crybabies" and "not-my-job-ers."

The cumulative effects of such characters can be devastating. "It increases turnover," Topchik said. "People stay absent more, they're late more, you get increased customer complaints, higher error rates, loss of the competitive spirit. All of this is really bottom line. The most amazing thing I've found is that most of the people who are negative in the workplace don't know it. They don't get the feedback."

If any consensus has emerged in battling negativity, it comes down to this: Creating a culture of both trust and open communication is crucial. Identify troubled employees immediately and get to the bottom of what's eating at them. It all starts with a company's communication.

"The human mind does not like a vacuum," Bay said. "If you don't get information from the top, employees will fill in the blanks with their own information, and usually it's wrong."

Violations of trust in the workplace can lead to unforgivable bitterness.

Give the Complainer a Chance

Don McIver, vice president of human resources for the MWW Group public relations firm, recalled a complainer at a previous company who was considered a difficult challenge.

"Everything she could think of to complain about, she would," he said. "Any new benefit, there was something wrong with it. Every assignment, she wasn't happy with. We worked to understand her issues. She felt she was wronged in terms of her compensation and some of the positions and responsibilities she

How to NOW! — Managing the Troubled Employee...

Checklist of Unsatisfactory Job Performance

The following checklist describes job performance issues that may indicate a troubled employee and signal the supervisor that action needs to be taken.

Absenteeism

- Instances of leaving without permission
- Excessive sick leave
- Frequent Monday and/or Friday absence
- Repeated absences, particularly if they follow a pattern
- Lateness at work; esp. on Monday mornings; and/or returning from lunch
- Leaving work early
- Peculiar and increasingly unbelievable excuses for absences or lateness
- Absent more often than other employees for colds, flu, gastritis, etc.
- Frequent unscheduled short-term absences (with or without medical explanation)

"On the Job Absenteeism"

- Continued absences from post more than job requires, "goofing off"
- Long coffee breaks, lunch breaks
- Repeated undealt-with physical illness on the job
- Frequent trips to the restroom

Uneven Work Pattern

- Alternate periods of high and low productivity

High Accident Rate

- Accidents on the job
- Accidents off the job (but affecting job performance)
- "Horseplay" which causes unsafe conditions

Checklist cont. on page four

Achieve organizational excellence through Organizational Development Consultation

Organizational development (OD) consultants at The Village Business Institute assist organizations in assessing organizational strengths and opportunities, managing change, developing effective teams, streamlining organizational processes, and implementing a strategic planning process.

Methodologies include interviews, surveys, situational analysis, testing and/or focus groups, and a review of policies and procedures. Following the assessment, we will present you with a comprehensive report of the results, including observations and recommendations.

- Develop strategies for capitalizing on organizational strengths.
- Empower leaders and individuals in your organization.
- Institute change easier and faster.
- Enhance the decision-making process.
- Use conflict to your advantage.
- Improve communication across all levels of the organization.
- Develop reward systems that reinforce your organizational values and goals.
- Promote risk-taking, innovation and creativity.
- Develop processes that enhance, rather than impede, employee productivity.
- Determine and prioritize customer needs.



For more information, contact Darrin, 701-451-5027, or Judith, 701-451-5031.

Negative Employees *continued from page three*

was given, that she wasn't being recognized for her contributions."

McIver decided to give her a chance to show the company what she could do.

"We gave her some additional assignments with newer technologies and addressed some of her concerns about her work environment, and also relatively easy stuff like her work space, the type of computer she was using," he said.

"It really was a lot of minor things that added up to a high frustration point. It turned out the manager didn't handle her situation well. Some of her frustration was justified because she got no relief from the manager. We found she didn't realize fully how much of an effect her attitude was having on other people."

After some of her issues were addressed, the worker's attitude changed and she became the leader of one of the biggest projects in her group. "That was a complete turnaround from where she was a year ago," McIver said.

Other approaches have taken unconventional turns. Topchik tells the story of a store plagued with negative attitudes — especially in one department. "So what this guy did, he hired actors as extras for six weeks and said, 'The only thing I want you to do is spread positivity among the other sales people.' It worked. The employees saw other ways of behaving. It becomes very cultural."

The simplest way to a happy workplace may be, in the end, to focus on some basic human wants. "We're all born with four needs: live, love, ego and variety," Bay said. "Everything we do is driven by one of those four needs. Love and ego means being appreciated, being thanked. We all want to stand out in a crowd."

Checklist *continued from page three*

Problems with Memory

- Difficulty in recalling instructions, details, conversations, etc.
- Difficulty recalling one's own mistakes

Difficulty in Concentration

- Work requires greater effort
- Jobs takes more time
- Repeated mistakes due to inattention
- Making bad decisions or using poor judgment
- Errors in written communication
- Forgetfulness

Confusion

- Difficulty following instructions
- Increasing difficulty handling complex assignments

Reporting to Work

- Coming to/returning to work in an obviously altered condition

General Lowered Job Efficiency

- Missed deadlines, unreliable
- Complaints from customers
- Improbable excuses for poor job performance
- Cannot be depended on to be where they say or do what they say
- Shuns job assignments, incomplete assignments
- Problems performing manual tasks

Poor Employee Relationships on the Job

- Failure to keep promises and unreasonable excuses for failing to keep promises
- Over-reaction to real or imagined criticism
- Borrowing money from co-workers
- Unreasonable resentments
- Avoidance of associates
- Lying and exaggerating
- Complaints from co-workers, supervisors, other staff
- Blames others for problems

Appearance

- Decreasing attention to personal appearance and hygiene
- Odor of alcohol on breath
- Glassy, red eyes
- Tremors
- Inability to walk steadily

Other Behaviors

- Sleeping on the job
- Withdraws from others, isolates self
- Mood Swings
- Increasing irritability
- Relates problems at home, with relationships, with finances, etc.
- Abrupt, radical changes in behavior, (*i.e.* violent outbursts)

While they may not justify an immediate response, the items identified by you on this checklist may nevertheless indicate a need for action.