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Solutions

A newsletter for managers, supervisors and human resource staff eligible for Kepro services



The following questions and answers are designed to help provide assistance related to issues that supervisors may be facing. Kepro, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides confidential consultation to managers seeking guidance related to a variety of workplace challenges.

I'm a new supervisor and have inherited an employee whose poor performance issues have never been addressed. What's the best way to handle this? I can tell others on the team are feeling like they are being held to higher standards.

It is generally expected that supervisors will prioritize addressing employee problems, but one consequence of putting personnel problems on the back burner is that other employees notice it. This leads to the general belief that subpar work will be tolerated. It also sends a message that employees don't have to worry about being accountable. Many of these secondary problems will not be noticeable early on, but over the course of weeks and months, productivity will suffer. This can lead to decreased morale, increased turnover, and other behavioral risks. Often the most valuable workers leave the organization because it is easier for them to do so. The best place to start is by calling the EAP and consulting with a Workplace Specialist from our Management Services team, who will review the situation with you and discuss steps to take to address the performance issues.

I have two employees experiencing conflict and it is becoming increasingly disruptive to the workplace. Should I refer these employees to the EAP, or is it OK for a supervisor such as myself to help these employees resolve the conflict with a structured approach first?

Some amount of conflict in the workplace is normal and to be expected. At other times it can become harmful to productivity and morale. Supervisors should understand the basics of conflict resolution. One approach is to meet privately with each employee first. Identify common ground, the larger goal, and each employee's perspective. Identify the root cause of the conflict. In a joint meeting, allow each person to discuss their thoughts and concerns with active listening skills. Encourage brainstorming for a potential solution between the employees. Create an action plan and a follow-up approach with timelines and responsibilities for each participant. Later, check in with each employee to see whether the conflict has been resolved. Use the EAP as a resource if a conflict remains, because sometimes a personality style or other problems undermine the process described above. Each employee should understand that ongoing conflict would be a performance issue and that they have a responsibility to demonstrate teamwork, collaboration, and support for a positive workplace.



Recently an employee's resignation left me really surprised. I felt like it came out of left field. Now I'm worried I don't have a good read on my employees. What can I do to be sure I'm doing what I need to be as a supervisor to reduce the likelihood of an employee leaving?

Not every decision to quit a job is preventable, because many employees have paths for their careers where opportunities emerge and decisions to leave are compelling. Still, the supervisor can influence a work environment to maximize an employee's desire to stay. To reduce being surprised by resigning employees, try scheduling regular one-on-one meetings with employees so feedback can be shared, discuss concerns as they arise, understand their goals, and understand how to best meet their needs. These meetings can be short "check-ins" that still give you the information you seek. Typically, employees interested in quitting a job show reduced engagement or verbalize dissatisfaction. Pay attention to these signals so you can be responsive to their concerns or actions.

Can anyone be taught to be a good supervisor or do certain personality or temperament issues impede being an effective supervisor?

Supervisory skills are teachable; however, some people may possess natural abilities, personality qualities, or temperament that lend themselves more easily to a leadership role. This does not mean others aren't able to learn these skills. A person may struggle to be an effective supervisor if they lack a well-developed sense of empathy. Empathy is associated with a broad range of important capabilities, such as emotional intelligence (EI).

EI is the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions and those of others. But empathy goes much further. It is crucial, for example, in facilitating active listening and understanding. When people feel heard and understood, they are more likely to express themselves honestly. They feel safer with the authority figure, and this leads to better dialogue, problem-solving, and conflict resolution within the relationship. Supervisors have a great resource in their EAP to help them develop many soft skills associated with leadership and communication.

My employee has been found sleeping at his desk several times. I am going to arrange a meeting with him today to discuss this. My question is, should I ask him to see his doctor, or refer him to the EAP? This must be some sort of medical or sleep disorder sort of problem.

You may consider encouraging your employee to contact the EAP for support and guidance with the issues they are facing that is causing him to sleep during the workday. Avoid any kind of attempt to diagnose and keep the conversation focused on workplace expectations around behavior and performance. Sleeping at one's desk could be explained by a medical problem but also by a dozen other issues. Encouraging EAP as a resource and documenting doing so is advised. If you need support with how to handle a situation like this, the EAP can help.



As a supervisor I have to make some decisions that are not always popular. Is there anything I can do to make this easier?

The fear of making an unpopular decision is virtually unavoidable, and all supervisors must face this challenge to be effective. Here are some tips to make this easier:

1. Remind yourself that your primary responsibility is to make decisions that align with the goals of the organization. If you primarily fear not being liked by subordinates, then these two goals will naturally conflict.
2. Frequently involve team members and seek their input and feedback regarding decisions. This inclusive approach can help you gather different perspectives and dramatically reduce conflict later. Also, it is at this stage where you should communicate your rationale for a decision, not later when staff are reacting adversely to it.
3. Establish a work environment that enables communication to flow easily. When conflict arises, even from your decisions, tension will be reduced more quickly.
4. Build a relationship of trust with your employees. Doing so will also reduce animosity and objections to the important decisions you make. One way to build trust is to be genuine and authentic with your message. You may even verbalize that the decision you had to make was not easy for you.
5. Promote an open-door policy and encourage feedback from employees.

Kepro Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The Employee Assistance Program through Kepro assists organizations and their workforce in managing the personal challenges that impact employee well-being, performance and effectiveness. Kepro's life management consultants employ a comprehensive approach that identifies issues impacting the employee and assists them in developing meaningful solutions.

The Employee Assistance Program can be accessed anytime, for free, confidential support from a professional consultant or online resource. Call or log on today.

 **Phone: 1.800.833.3031**

 **Website: www.EAPHelplink.com**

 **Company Code: IOWA**

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