

A Supervisor's Role

Dealing with troubled employees

Your company's success relies on how productive and creative your staff is. Personal problems have the potential of affecting your staff's work performance. An employee assistance program (EAP) can provide solutions to many of these problems.

There may be marital problems, difficulties with children or financial problems. Job-related stress can also cause noticeable changes in an employee. Employees abusing drugs will eventually do poor work. Some early clues that an employee may be experiencing a personal concern include mood swings, inability to stay on task, absenteeism, tardiness, conflict with co-workers and inattention to details just to name a few.

It is a supervisor's job to ensure that their staff is working up to its capacity. This starts with a manager learning how to determine who needs help and what kind of help is needed. If the performance of an employee is marginal, then find out why. Reasons may include confusion about expectations, lack of skills, confusing goals, ineffective co-workers, or inefficient systems. After identifying the source of the problem, work to resolve the situation. Set clear goals and expectations. Give positive feedback if work performance improves.

If the employee is not adequately improving performance, then it is time to step in. Proceed quickly before the problem magnifies. Start with a discussion about the declining performance. Give specific examples of the changes in performance that has occurred. Don't try to diagnose the problem. Instead, refer the employee to EAP. Constructive managerial intervention can help an unproductive employee seek assistance through an EAP. The EAP will not take over your job as manager as it is still your ultimate responsibility to handle job performance and absenteeism problems.

Obtaining help is the employee's choice, but doing inadequate work is not. One poorly performing employee can permeate your entire department and reduce everyone's job performance. Letting an unhappy or unproductive employee go unassisted can be a costly mistake, both in loss of money and human potential. If the employee's work fails to improve, proceed with disciplinary action according to company policy. It is important to be fair and consistent in your treatment of the employee and in accurately documenting important information. Continue to follow up on the problem until there is some resolution.