

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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800.451.1834

Available 24/7

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Negative Employee Attitudes Both Sides of the Story

Q. How do I coach an employee with a negative attitude? Until now, I have ignored or avoided this employee. Should I continue this approach and coach others to do the same, or intervene? If I intervene, what steps can I use before finally referring to the EAP?

A. Negativity is an attitude issue within the definition of job performance. Other factors include quality of work, quantity of work, attendance, appearance, behavior, and availability. Meet with your employee and discuss the negativity. Share examples so there is no dispute over what you observe. Negative attitudes can stem from many causes. Some are benign, but off-putting, like a cynical sense of humor. Others are more serious, like major complaints about the organization or supervisor or dislike of one's job. Your conversation will probably yield a good explanation for the negativity, because most employees are aware of their personality issues gained from past confrontations or relationship struggles with others. Ask your employee how your relationship with him or her can facilitate a more positive disposition. Do not tell others to cope better with negativity. Negativity has a contagious influence, so refer to the EAP rather than risk morale problems.

Q. EAPs see self-referred employees for any type of personal problem. If the problem is primarily about the supervisor, however, will the EAP urge the employee to sign a release so the other side of the story can be obtained from the supervisor?

A. EAPs work with the information provided by employees to guide them toward a workable solution. Complaints about supervisors are common, but EAPs do not need "the other side of the story" from the supervisor to help employees navigate their way to a better relationship. If such information is needed, the employee can supply it or the EAP can request it. You may feel uncomfortable imagining your employees at the EAP office talking about you, but you should understand that EAPs are hosted by organizations. This means EAPs seek healthful and productive resolutions that benefit employees in their roles as workers without dismissing the primacy of the organization or undermining your role or position.

Alcohol-Abuse

Q. Do employees self-refer to EAPs for help with alcoholism, or is this the type of personal problem that will ultimately require a formal referral because of denial?

A. Self-referrals do occur, but they typically result from drinking-related incidents, not simply the awareness of alcoholism. Like other illnesses with behavioral aspects to them, enabling and denial act as forces making self-diagnosis difficult. A DUI, the fear of divorce, or a “close call,” among other situations, may motivate self-referrals. Alcoholics are seeking help for their “drinking problem,” even in these circumstances—they hope to regain control over their drinking. They often have ruled out the possibility of alcoholism based on their own unique definition, which excludes them. This is where expertise is crucial in the assessment process. The EA professional may have only one shot at helping these employees understand the nature of what they are dealing with and motivating them to take the next step. The client must be sold on the benefits—the promises of recovery—that result from proper treatment. Some clients are ready for this message, while others are not. The window of motivation is short. The good news is that the predictability of future crises almost guarantees them another chance to hear the message and accept help.



Employee Motivation

Q. Is there a way to not just motivate employees to do their job but also have them really go to the next level and become excited and proactive about their role and the company’s mission? Or is it just pure luck if you get an employee who can motivate him- or herself like this?

A. Some employees do motivate themselves because they know the value of being energized. They’ve learned that love of the job comes by engaging the organization, understanding their role and its importance, and seeing all the possibilities before them. Other employees must be inspired and shown what lies over the mountaintop. Your ability to inspire this latter group is a critical skill that can reduce turnover and attitude problems and boost productivity. To inspire employees, spend time with them and demonstrate your own enthusiasm so they can see

it. They will be compelled to model it. Help them get clear about their role and your performance expectations. (A common complaint heard by EAPs from employees is a lack of understanding of what the supervisor wants from them.) Help employees understand the company’s strategic plan and direction, their role in it, and the value of their work product or services. Always let employees have some say in what they would like to accomplish, and set goals, evaluate, and give feedback toward that end during the year.

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