

Frontline Supervisor

■ **How do I document an attitude problem so there is no uncertainty later about what I mean? What really bothers me most is the cynicism, eye rolling, and sighing.**

Behaviors such as rolling one's eyes, sighing, and huffing may be triggering but are difficult to document. The key is discovering what is articulable and quantifiable and has an adverse impact. Do words like arrogant, aggressive, cynical, critical, indifferent, or rude describe your employee's attitude? If arrogance is descriptive, documentation might be: *"John often demonstrates an exaggerated sense of his importance or abilities. For example, on (date, time) he remarked that 'everyone in the office is too lazy to learn the combination to the file cabinet,' so they 'rely on him' to open it in the morning. Such a statement has a negative effect on office morale and creates conflict."* (Note how this example does not label the employee as "arrogant." You are using the definition of it followed by an example. This is more effective.) Formulate attitude documentation with 1) behavior associated with the attitude, 2) a description of what was said or what happened, and 3) its adverse impact. (Hint: The EAP can offer general guidance on documentation, and a dictionary may provide descriptive words you're searching for.)

■ **What reason do supervisors give for why they did not refer a troubled employee to the EAP following a tragic incident in the workplace where there were signs and symptoms clearly present?**

Numerous tragedies that occur in the workplace have been associated with troubled employees, including accidental death, workplace violence, and property damage, among others. These incidents may have been prevented if the worker was referred to the EAP earlier. There are two dominant reasons for not having referred such employees early on. One is the supervisor's belief that no serious problem existed because evidence of behavior or performance problems was intermittent. If periods of normalcy and satisfactory performance existed, it may have appeared that the employee's problems were personally manageable, and the unease associated with a formal EAP referral wasn't necessary. The other reason is that the employee's awareness of their problem and what to do about it appeared convincing enough to the supervisor to dismiss the idea of a formal referral. If a supervisor periodically wonders if a referral to the EAP is necessary for an employee, contacting the EAP for a consult is the prudent action.

■ **I am a new supervisor. What supervisory skills can the EAP best help me develop if I get into**

There are many skills a supervisor needs in order to be effective. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the specific skill that is lacking in order to address a particular problem. This is where the EAP might help. For example, if morale in your work unit is an issue, and you don't see it improving, is it

situations or experience problems I can't manage properly?

because you lack effective communication skills? Are interpersonal skills the problem? Could you improve your conflict resolution skills? Then again, is it possible the morale problem is mostly out of your control? Use the EAP to help you troubleshoot issues you experience on the job, particularly interpersonal, intrapersonal, and soft-skill-related issues. The EAP may help you with personal issues, refer you to effective skill development resources, or even send you back to your supervisor or the organization for coaching or mentorship, but with clarification of your needs.

■ **What is the best way to develop loyalty among staff? I have respect from employees, and I respect them. I feel that, but loyalty is something more. How is it defined, and how do I get it?**

A good way to look at loyalty versus respect is to see that loyalty is a layer of dedication to your leadership that has been built on respect over time. Your employees may respect your position, authority, skills, and abilities, but whether they go the extra mile is a question associated with loyalty. Loyalty is earned by respecting your employees over time and is nurtured by understanding the needs of each of your employees and what they need to be happy, healthy, and productive. Loyalty is the dividend of investing yourself in the relationship you have with each of your employees. Loyalty is currency to get things done. When your employees respect you as a leader, they may deliver 100%. When they are loyal, they'll reach even further.

■ **Is bickering a problem I should refer to the EAP? I have a few employees in our small office, and they seem to get on each other's nerves quite a bit. They don't complain about it, and they are great performers. Personally, however, I don't like the tension.**

Strain among employees in close quarters is probably not something you are going to be able to entirely eliminate. It is the nature of relationships, even good ones, to experience conflict, especially in tight quarters. As you observe, performance appears unaffected. However, not all small conflicts are the same. You may want to delve deeper just to ensure something small won't later turn into something serious or risky to the workplace. For example, is the bickering or tension caused by inequity or unfairness? Are work roles not balanced well? Does one of your employees believe they have a better future than another? Inquire about these or similar issues periodically so you understand what may be underlying the conflicts beyond the apparent issues they involve.

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