THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER

THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

October Online Seminar

Improve Your Health With Ergonomics and Frequent Movement

Sedentary behavior is the fourth leading risk factor of death for people all over the world. Learn to incorporate frequent desk exercises and movement into your day. Additionally, learn proper ergonomic tips to help ease job stress and reduce chronic injury.

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Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series & Leadership Certificate Program

Below are recordings of the webinars presented so far this year as part of this series. Attendance is tracked for both the live and recorded sessions; therefore, viewing the below recordings will count toward the Leadership Certificate requirement of attending 5 out of the 6 webinars.

Thinking for Success
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/7693502043189076739

How to Motivate Your Employees
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/1311003071536328962

Five Steps to Building Trust with Your Team
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/3879793188239462914

Advanced Coaching Skills for Leaders
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/741751819608174595

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How to Retain Your Top Achievers

Paying attention to your employees’ career development pays off in their commitment.

Are you worried about keeping your top performers? You should be—especially if you haven’t been talking with them about where their careers are headed.

Your most valuable employees—the high achievers who require low maintenance—are prime targets for recruiters. They’ll become even more attractive as the job market rebounds. These are the very folks who are most marketable to other employers, and you’ll feel the pinch if you haven’t created a reason for them to stay.

To avoid losing the people you need most, make sure your management routine includes discussing career development with your employees.

Effective managers make it a point to guide and support employees in attaining career goals. This can be done in settings as simple as informal discussions. Practiced consistently, this actually makes a manager’s job easier—a little time invested in coaching employees is a lot less costly than managing short-handed.

Let’s consider a hypothetical employee, based on many cases I’ve seen as a career advisor. I’ll call him “Jack.” A highly skilled software engineer and a top performer, Jack is self-motivated, a good problem solver and an independent worker. Before the economy slowed, recruiters regularly tempted him with interesting software challenges, more money, faster career growth. Now they’re calling again.

A few weeks ago, a recruiter contacted Jack about a position with a higher salary. After a series of interviews, Jack received a generous offer.

Jack mulled over his choices. When it came right down to it, money wasn’t the issue for Jack; it was the future of his career. The new company was wooing him with new career options, while his own employer was silent.

Approaching his manager to ask about future career possibilities, Jack was rebuffed. His boss angrily interpreted Jack’s actions as a sign of disloyalty. Rather than help him sort out his career concerns, she launched her response with, “After all I’ve done for you…”

The boss’s reaction provided the impetus Jack needed. He accepted the new position.

The time and money that it took to find a replacement for Jack cost the manager much more than if she’d been discussing Jack’s career goals with him all along. Had his manager listened closely enough, she would have heard Jack’s uncertainty about leaving, and she could have discussed ways to help him with career planning. All Jack needed was a good reason to stay.

If you haven’t been communicating with your employees about their career development—or if you’d like to try some new ways of doing so—here are some tips to help you open the lines of communication:

Conduct professional development inventories for each of your people. What do you know about their short-term and long-term goals? What do they see as their next move in the company? What strengths would they like to build on? If you don’t know the answers, these questions could be good starting points for your discussions.
Identify important tools and resources for professional development and career management. What internal and external training courses are available? Is tuition reimbursement an option? If so, how does it work? What can you find out about job descriptions, qualifications, and requirements? Does your company maintain a database of skills and competencies needed for specific jobs? Are there committees, task forces and other groups that could help employees grow professionally?

List development possibilities in your area. Look for ways to build on people’s strengths by adding new tasks or challenges. Assign new projects, initiate cross-training, and identify skill-building opportunities. Stay abreast of company plans that might create such opportunities.

Tell your staff that you intend to start discussing individual career development. Let them know what you’ll be doing and why. If you’re not sure what to say, try this at your next staff meeting: “I was reading an article about managing careers, and I realized we don’t talk enough about this topic. I’d like to do more. What do you think? What would be helpful to you?”

Offer each of your employees an opportunity to discuss their plans. Set aside private time to talk about their goals, plans and expectations. Keep it informal and ask lots of questions. Don’t evaluate—just listen. Offer ideas and suggestions for development. Ask them how you can help them reach their goals. Offer to be an ongoing resource.

Consider employees’ interests and values when delegating work. People are motivated most by work that interests them—and what interests them may not always be where their skills and experience lie. Find out what they want to do, and then leverage their interests to your advantage, as well as theirs.

View employees as partners, essential to the department’s success. You’re not expected to have all the answers—if you think you do, your staff probably resents it! Allow people to disagree with you and to vent dissatisfaction when they need to. Don’t always think you have to fix things. Sometimes listening is all that’s needed.

Help employees network with colleagues, inside and outside the company. You can build commitment by giving employees visibility. What resources, internal and external, can you point employees to for information and to build their professional networks?

Look for opportunities for employees to represent your department on company-wide projects, or allow employees a day to shadow colleagues in other departments. Your key performers will be less likely to jump ship if they have a better understanding of other roles, functions, and career possibilities in the organization. And even if they do decide to leave, they’re more likely to respect you enough to ease the transition.

Seize opportunities for casual conversations with your employees. Chatting about career development doesn’t have to be a formal event. A 15-minute talk over coffee can be more productive than a scheduled meeting in your office. Go for a walk or grab a quick lunch together. Keep the informal lines of communication open.

Regularly set aside 10 to 15 minutes during staff meetings to discuss career topics. Years of corporate restructuring have caused people to equate talk of career development with downsizing, because career issues often are only discussed during crises. Incorporate career development topics into your staff meetings. Let your people pick the topics and make presentations to the rest of the group. Focus on such things as self-marketing tips, training resources, networking skills and industry trends.

Take charge of your own career development. If you’re not feeling good about your own future, you can’t be very effective in helping your employees with theirs. If your boss hasn’t been a good career advisor or resource, seek him or her out and ask about opportunities for development. Map out your own career development and you’ll be more likely get where you want to go—and you’ll be a great role model for your staff.

Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

Q. I have always been a little resistant to referring my star performers to the EAP. Instead, I have discussed personal problems with them. This is not the right approach, but I fear the word might get out and damage their careers. Can you help me with this issue?

A. There is an important dynamic worth understanding when it comes to helping employees with their personal problems who you also supervise. This is the “dual relationship” conflict where the employment relationship interferes with your ability to play the role of a counselor or problem solver. You cannot successfully alter this dynamic. Playing both roles of boss and counselor interferes with employees’ ability to share complete information that is potentially critical to resolving their problem. You may hear only 95 percent of what’s going on, and therefore offer the wrong advice, discuss the wrong problem, or at best facilitate half-measures that make the problem worse. A better approach is to encourage your employees to phone the EAP and make their own decision. Confidentiality rules associated with EAPs are the strictest of their kind. Consider talking with the EAP about confidentiality. You’ll discover how truly safe EAPs are for employees to use.

Q. I am concerned about an employee who works too much. I would like to make a referral to the EAP, but until now I have given only outstanding performance evaluations. The employee also spends time helping other employees. This is a very unusual level of overwork. What could explain it?

A. Create a corrective plan with a reasonable workload with which to comply. Encourage a self-referral to the EAP based on your concern about the level of overwork. Later, if needed, make a more formal referral for failure to maintain the level of performance standards you specified in the plan (or mini-contract.) Employees with strong work ethics are to be admired, but it appears you are observing something far different. All employees bring their personalities to work, and sometimes these include mental health issues. These issues do not necessarily interfere with occupational functioning or become measurable concerns for management. However, when they do, disturbances in personal and work boundaries will typically become noticeable. EAPs are in an ideal spot to help employers address issues of this sort so valuable workers with treatable conditions can remain gainfully employed. Obsessive-compulsive behaviors, codependency issues, drug use, or a mental health problem with a manic component to it could each explain the behavior you are witnessing.

Q. I have an employee who comes to work with a slight smell of alcohol on the breath. He appears perfectly sober and capable of work. I haven’t had a problem at all with him. I have not referred for testing because I am not suspicious he is under the influence. Should I be?

A. Don’t ignore this any longer. You should review your organization’s drug and alcohol policy for guidance on how to proceed. Also consult with the EAP and your manager. Workplaces are different and so are drug and alcohol policies. While a hospital may prohibit alcohol consumption by employees during the workday, other business organizations that entertain customers may have no such provision – even while employees are away from a facility on a lunch break. Alcohol on the breath in the morning may signal maintenance drinking; the employee consumes alcohol to prevent symptoms of withdrawal, which would be visible if the blood alcohol level were to drop. High tolerance in such instances would allow the employee to appear sober, even though he has a relatively high blood alcohol content, which makes him a safety risk.

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